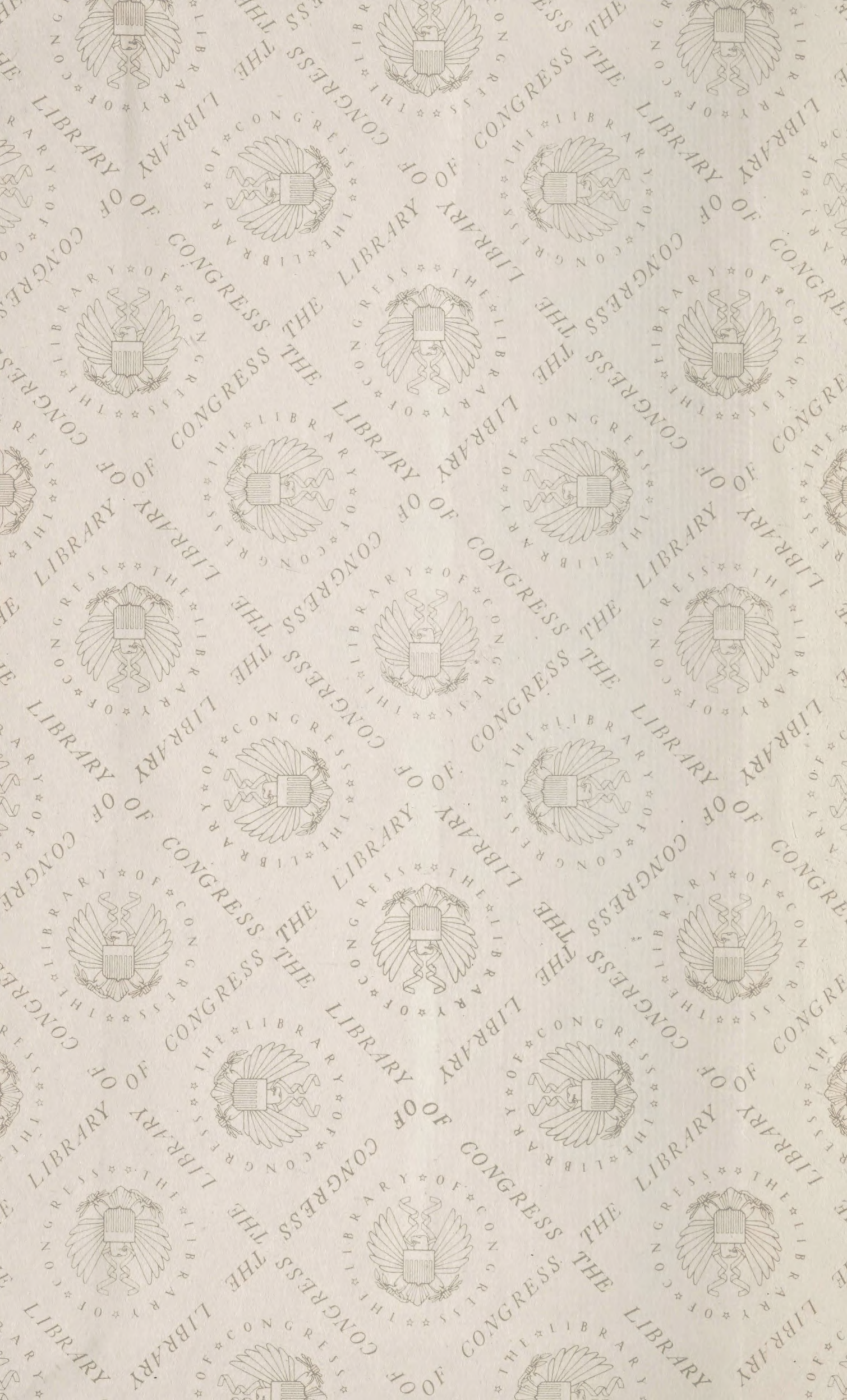


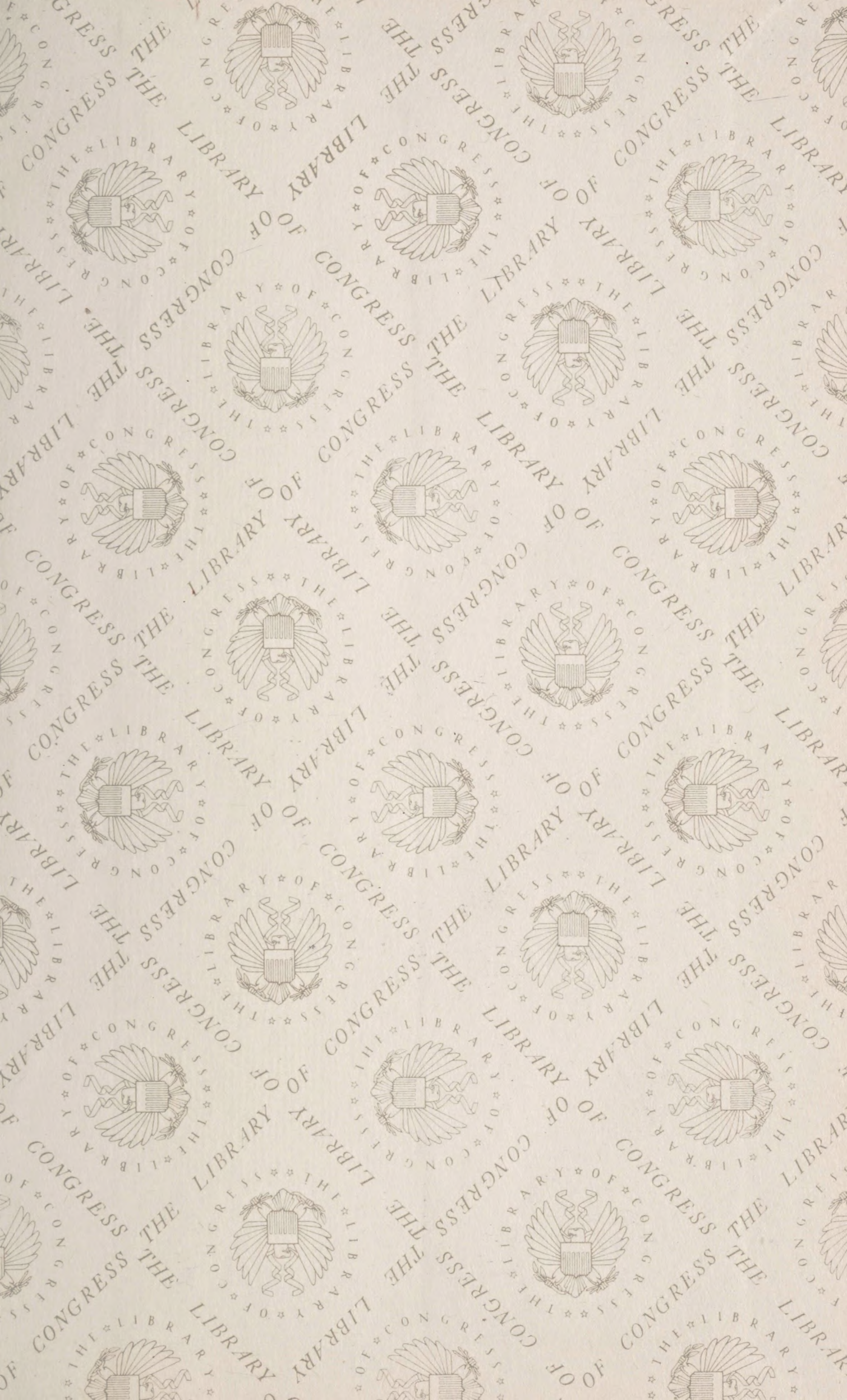
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The Angel of the Bells

(L'ANGE DU BOURDON.)

BY F. DU BOISGOBEY.

[TRANSLATED BY MRS. LAURA E. KENDALL.]

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THE ANGEL OF THE BELLS

CHAPTER I.

THE old landmarks of Paris are fast disappearing. The old Hôtel-Dieu, or City Hospital, has been demolished, but ten years ago it disfigured the surroundings of Notre Dame, and its dingy and dilapidated façade cut off all view of the river from such visitors as came to admire the cathedral immortalized by Victor Hugo.

These visitors, however, were chiefly country people or foreigners, for Parisians rarely visit these places of interest, and seldom extend their rambles to the old part of the town. It is a poor, but respectable quarter, inhabited by persons of limited means who rarely leave home, and who have a very meager appreciation of the architectural beauties of the church built by Philippe Auguste.

At the time of which we speak, however, the usually silent and deserted square presented a very animated appearance on Thursdays and Sundays, the days on which the friends of hospital patients were allowed to visit them; but these receptions, though under the sanction of the government, contrasted strikingly with those that attracted luxurious equipages to the doors of the elegant mansions of the Faubourg Saint Germain. This was a coming and going of humble people who came afoot, and returned in the same way; still the square became almost gay in its aspect, and the sight was well worth seeing.

One pleasant Thursday in the spring of 1874, two gentlemen were regarding it from one of the upper windows of the long hospital. The younger of the two, who was smoking his pipe, in his shirt sleeves, with his elbows resting upon the window-sill, seemed to be making himself very much at home, as he had an undoubted right to do, for the room was his, it being one of the apartments reserved for the medical staff, to which he had been admitted about six

months before, after passing a brilliant examination. There could be no doubt that he was a remarkably good-looking young man, nor could his rather shabby clothing conceal a certain air of distinction; besides, he had the large black eyes and clear, colorless complexion that romantic young ladies so much admire.

The other, who was standing near him, but who was not smoking, was a man about forty years of age, tall, slender and angular, who strongly resembled the pictures of Don Quixote, and who must have been not unlike him in character, for his friends called him Don Meriadec, though his real name was Mederic Yves-Couan de Meriadec. He was a thorough Breton, and a baron, but a landless baron, and one who set little store by his title. His companion, Albert Daubrac, a native of Agen, was a typical Gascon, shrewd, ambitious and eminently practical; but contrast is the foundation of all ardent friendships, and in spite of the great difference in their ages, the two were devoted to each other.

“Look,” cried the young surgeon, suddenly, “there is the Angel of the Bells crossing the square. I wonder where she is coming from with that little basket? Oh, I see. She has been to the flower market. She is bringing home some gilly-flowers.”

“Do you mean that young girl who is walking toward the church?” inquired Meriadec.

“Yes, the one with a plaid shawl over her shoulders, and a *fichu* on her pale golden hair. Did you ever see as pretty a girl in your province of Brittany. Nowhere in France can you find beauties equal to those who first see the light in the porters’ lodges of Paris.”

Meriadec drew from its case a large lorgnette, which he wore strapped over his shoulder after the fashion of an English tourist, leveled it at the person indicated, and said, in a tone of deep conviction:

“She is beautiful. There is not the slightest doubt of it. She looks like a madonna. Why do you call her the Angel of the Bells?”

“Because her father is the bell-ringer of Notre Dame. Some of the people in the neighborhood call her the fairy of the tower, but I prefer the surname I have given her.”

“Are you a favored admirer?”

“She has no favored one. She is a model of discretion,

my dear fellow. And she certainly deserves no little credit for it, at her age, and with a face like hers. Don't you think so?"

"There can be no question about that, particularly as she is probably far from rich."

"She has only what she earns by making artificial flowers. Verdiere is an old soldier, who drinks up all his salary, and doesn't give his daughter Rose a cent to dress herself with. I even suspect that she defrays part of the household expenses."

"She lives with him, then?"

"Yes, in the North Tower, I know not how many feet above the ground. She lives in a queer little stone box where I could not stay twenty-four hours without dying of the blues, but she sings all day long, and seems to be as gay as a lark. There, she is going in now."

The young girl, had, in fact, disappeared around the corner of the Rue du Cloitre-Notre-Dame.

"What a pity!" sighed Meriadec. "It was a real pleasure to look at her."

"I am almost certain that you are already dreaming of protecting her from those who would seek to rob her of her virtue," exclaimed Daubrac. "But she needs no such champion. She can protect herself very well, without assistance, so repress your chivalrous instincts, and admit that one sometimes sees most agreeable visions from my windows."

"They certainly furnish one with more amusement than mine on the Rue Cassette, where no one ever passes."

"Why on earth did you select it for your lodgings, then? Here, the scene is constantly changing. Look at that couple passing the church. Two lovers, I suspect. The lady wears a thick veil, and clings closely to her attendant, who hangs his head so no one can catch a glimpse of his face. And yet, they certainly belong to the upper circles. The man is fashionably dressed, and the lady's costume is fresh from the hands of a fashionable *modiste*."

"Very possibly, but they interest me much less than that fair-haired girl."

"It always amuses me to watch the movements of lovers, especially when they are trying to hide their love. These two are evidently obliged to meet in an unfrequented part of the city. Ah! they are turning into the Rue du Cloitre,

like Rose Verdiere. They are going to make the ascent of the tower, perhaps."

"How absurd!"

"Not so very absurd, I am sure. Up there near the clouds must be a delightful place for love-making. One would have the blue heavens for a roof, and no spectators but the swallows. It is an idea worth remembering, and I intend to put it in practice at the very first opportunity."

Meriadec leveled his glass at the church, and but a few moments had passed when he exclaimed: "You were right. It seems to me that I did see a head above the balustrade on the bell tower."

"Which is the only tower visitors are allowed to climb. I am positive that our lovers are there. It would be a capital joke to follow them."

"I'm sure I have no desire to disturb their *tête-à-tête*."

"But we can catch a glimpse of the Angel of the Bells as we pass. Her room is just off the staircase that leads to the top of the tower. This staircase is protected by a grating, at which visitors are obliged to ring, and very often it is the daughter who comes to open it, for old Verdiere is not fond of exerting himself."

"I should be charmed to get another look at the Angel of the Bells. But to climb away up there—"

"Oh, that will be a trifle for you, with your long legs; besides, we shall not be obliged to go higher than the gallery that crosses the façade. We can stop there and await the return of the veiled lady. I should like to get a good look at her."

"There is no certainty of our meeting her. She and her escort have probably continued their promenade on *terra firma*."

"Even in that case, we shall have no cause to regret our climb, for it will give us a capital appetite. The sky is cloudless, the air mild; we shall get a birds'-eye view of Paris, and with your fine lorgnette, you can make out your house on the Rue Cassette. I shall not be on duty again until four o'clock, so I have plenty of time to stretch my legs."

"And I have nothing whatever to do."

"Then come with me. You will find an opportunity to display your chivalry, perhaps,—some persecuted damsel to defend, or a lost child to adopt."

"That decides me," replied Meriadec, laughing.

"Good! I knew you would come!"

The friends left the window. The young surgeon slipped on a short coat, caught up his hat, and pushed Don Meriadec toward the stairs.

"There, I was sure of it!" exclaimed Daubrac, glancing up at the church as they descended the steps of the hospital. "They have reached the middle gallery, already. Don't you see them up there? The lady has lifted her veil, and it is floating gayly in the breeze. Get out your glass, old fellow, and tell me if she is pretty."

Don Meriadec drew his lorgnette from its case, but before he could use it, the lady who had leaned upon the balustrade for an instant to rest, disappeared with her escort.

"A total eclipse!" cried the young surgeon. "Put away your glass, and let us try to make up for lost time. The entrance to the tower is on the Rue du Cloitre. Come on."

"Let us have another look at this wonderful façade," said Meriadec, who was never in a hurry.

"You have seen it often enough from my window."

"I never tire of gazing at it, especially at the rose window, in the middle. The sun is shining upon it just at this moment, and the panes glow as if they were on fire."

"Oh, the deuce take you, I say. I would rather see a pretty face than the handsomest rose window in the universe!"

"There is no poetry in your soul. I am well aware of that. But you must certainly grant me five minutes to impress this superb picture upon my memory. What a pity I am not an artist!"

"Unfortunately you are only a lunatic. Did you ever hear any one go mad over a building in this fashion? If you don't take care, you will end your days in an insane asylum. Come, I am determined not to miss my look at the lady with the blue veil."

As he spoke Daubrac seized his friend by the arm and tried to drag him along. But his efforts were fruitless. Meriadec was as obstinate as a mule, and his companion was obliged to wait until his raptures were over.

"You will not miss it," he remarked. "I see her now upon the summit of the tower."

“You are right, upon my word!” exclaimed Daubrac. It hasn’t taken her long to make the ascent, and I begin to suspect that she is an Englishwoman. There, she has disappeared again. She has probably gone to view the panorama from a different point, that is, unless she and her sweetheart have seated themselves in the middle of the platform to whisper tender nothings to each other. We will not disturb them, but when they come down, they will be obliged to pass close to us, for the space is narrow, and I hope, for your sake, it will be the Angel of the Bells who opens the door of the winding stairs for us.”

This time, Don Meriadec needed no urging to induce him to follow his young comrade, who was directing his steps toward the Rue du Cloitre, but they had not gone ten paces when they heard loud and excited cries, and saw the visitors who were leaving the hospital rush wildly toward the church. In another moment, quite a large crowd had gathered between the base of the south tower and the Seine.

“Some accident must have happened,” remarked Daubrac.

“Or some one must have flung himself from the top of the tower.”

“It looks very much like it. Heaven grant that it was not the lady with the blue veil.”

“How absurd!” cried Meriadec. “A lady who thinks of committing suicide would not be very likely to take her lover with her.”

“Let us go and see,” said Daubrac, philosophically. “The person who has just taken this perilous leap certainly has no further need of my attention, but it is my business to testify to the fact that life is extinct.”

As they neared the crowd, the friends learned the real situation of affairs, for the bystanders were making loud and excited comments.

“She is still young, and she must have been pretty before her face was disfigured by her fall upon the pavement.”

“It certainly was not poverty that made her kill herself, for she is very richly dressed.”

“And she has on a watch and chain, and diamond earrings, and gold bracelets,” added another.

When Daubrac announced that he was a physician, the

crowd divided to let him pass. The circle had gathered around a dead body, and the corpse was that of a woman.

She had fallen upon her head; the skull had been shattered into fragments, and her face, which had been mashed to a jelly by the violence of the shock, was utterly unrecognizable. No one had dared to touch this bleeding body. Daubrac knelt upon the ground to examine it more closely, but, rising almost instantly, he said to the excited bystanders:

“Why are you standing here? You can certainly see that she was instantly killed by her fall. Go to the hospital for a litter, and send some policemen here.”

Several willing men started to obey, and as they did so, the surgeon turned to his friend and whispered:

“Upon my word! I believe it is she!”

“The lady who crossed the square on the arm of a gentleman, and whom we fancied we saw up there just now?” asked Meriadec.

“Yes. Don’t you see that it is the same costume—the same mantle—the same hat. Nothing is lacking except the blue veil, which was probably detached in her fall.”

“But how about the gentleman who was with her?” objected Meriadec.

“There was a violent scene upon the platform, probably a lover’s quarrel. He told her that he intended to break with her, perhaps, and in a paroxysm of despair, she sprung over the parapet before her lover had time to prevent it. The only reason he is not here before this, is because it is a long way down by the staircase. The poor woman chose the shortest route, but in a few minutes we shall see the conscience-stricken man come rushing down, and witness a scene of despair.”

“I am by no means anxious,” growled Meriadec. “This sight is quite enough for me.”

“You will not have to endure it long. I see the police coming now, and the litter will be here in a moment, for we are only a few hundred yards from the hospital. I will take the body there, and then, if you like, we will go and inform Rose Verdier of the accident. She can not have seen the fall, but she, perhaps, opened the door for the couple, so we have an excellent excuse for making the acquaintance of the Angel of the Bells.”

Two policemen and a sergeant of gendarmes, who chanced

to be on duty in the square, were approaching, also two servants from the hospital, bearing a litter.

"See there," cried Meriadec. "You were right after all. Here comes the lover running with all his might."

"What! that fellow who is gesticulating so wildly? No, indeed. In the first place he would not make his appearance from that quarter; besides, the lady's escort had on a tall hat and this man wears a red cap."

The man referred to, who was hastening up from the bridge, evidently had news of importance to communicate, for he was waving his arms wildly and uttering words that the two friends could not hear. He reached the crowd at the same time as the police and the litter-bearers, and rushing up to the sergeant, cried breathlessly:

"What are you doing here? The woman is dead; you can not restore her to life, and if you stay here looking at her, the murderer will escape."

"The murderer!" exclaimed Meriadec and Daubrac in the same breath.

"Yes, the scoundrel who threw her from the top of the tower."

"What nonsense you are talking!" said the sergeant, gruffly.

"I tell you I saw the deed. I was fishing from the bank on the other side of the river, and, as the fish didn't bite, I amused myself by looking at the church. Glancing up at the tower, I could distinctly see a man and woman upon the platform, and while I stood watching them, the man suddenly stooped, seized the woman about the waist, and threw her over the parapet."

"You must have wonderful eyes," growled the sergeant.

"I have passably good ones, that is a fact. If you do not believe what I say, come with me. He has not had time to come down, and if we make haste, we shall meet him on the stairs."

"The gentleman is right," said Daubrac. "Even if this should prove to be only a case of suicide, the person who witnessed it must be questioned."

"If you refuse to accompany me," continued the man in the red cap, "I shall go without you and arrest him unaided."

“You had better mind your own business. I know what I am about. Who are you, anyway?”

“Jean Fabreguette, an artist, residing at No. 19 Rue de la Huchette.”

“And I,” interposed Daubrac, “am a surgeon at the hospital. My friend here is the Baron Meriadec. We can identify the man, for we saw him cross the square with this lady on his arm.”

The sergeant still hesitated, but seeing that the crowd seemed inclined to make a rush toward the door leading to the towers, he deemed it advisable to make a move in the same direction.

In obedience to his orders, the body was placed upon the litter, and taken to the Hôtel-Dieu. Some of the crowd followed it, the others constituted themselves an escort for the sergeant, who walked between Meriadec and Daubrac. Fabreguette preceded them.

The crowd would certainly have invaded the tower, had not the sergeant stationed his subordinates at the entrance, with strict orders to allow only the two friends and the artist to pass.

They soon reached the grating, and the sergeant rang.

Mlle. Rose promptly appeared upon the threshold.

“Do you gentlemen wish to visit the towers?” she inquired, in a musical voice—a voice that went straight to Meriadec’s heart.

“No, I wish to see your father,” curtly replied the sergeant.

“My father is sick.”

“I know what that means. He has taken a drop too much. That makes no difference, I must see him. Open the door.”

The girl obeyed, and the sergeant entered Verdiere’s room. The others contented themselves with stepping inside the grating, and Daubrac said, smilingly:

“How do you do, mademoiselle?”

Rose, who had often met him in the square, recognized him and replied, with a slight blush:

“Very well, thank you, monsieur. Will you be kind enough to explain—”

“What we are doing here? It will be an easy matter. We are looking for a gentleman who passed with a lady about twenty minutes ago.”

“They came in just as I reached home.”

“You saw them, then.”

“No, I caught only a glimpse of them. My father, who is feeling quite ill to-day, left the grating open so he would not be disturbed, and I closed it only a few moments ago. Consequently, it so happened that the lady and gentleman went up without stopping. They will pay as they come down.”

“You think they are still up there, then?”

“Certainly.”

“You are very much mistaken, mademoiselle. The lady certainly is not. She flung herself, or was flung, from the top of the tower.”

“Good heavens!”

“Do you understand now, why we are looking for the gentleman?”

Before Rose, who had turned pale with emotion, could find time to reply, the sergeant reappeared in the door-way leading into the corridor, breathing bitter curses upon the keeper of the tower

“I knew it!” he muttered. “The brute is dead drunk. He is paid for watching the towers, and when his daughter is not at home, one can come in and go out without the slightest hinderance. So much the worse for him! I am certainly going to report him.”

“Oh, sir, I beseech you—”

“Hush!” whispered Daubrac, “some one is coming down.” The sound of footsteps could be distinctly heard on the staircase above. The sergeant seized Rose by the arm, pushed her into the keeper’s room, motioned his companions to form in line across the stairway, and stationed himself alone on the step in front of them. An instant afterward, the individual who was descending, came in sight, but stopped short on perceiving them.

Daubrac and Meriadec recognized him instantly. It was certainly the attendant of the lady with the blue veil. He had a handsome face, a superb figure, and the distinguished air of a person who moves in the best society. He exhibited some annoyance on seeing the stairway thus obstructed, but waited patiently for the party to divide and allow him to pass.

His manner underwent a sudden change, however, when the sergeant ordered him to advance.

“Is it to me you are speaking?” he asked, drawing himself up haughtily.

“Yes, to you. I have a few words to say to you. Step into the keeper’s room with me.”

“You must be mistaken in the person; still, I will consent to follow you and hear what you have to say, provided you will be quick about it.”

The sergeant pointed to the door and made the stranger pass in ahead of him. Father Verdiere was stretched out upon the bed, breathing heavily in his drunken slumber. His daughter had taken her stand by his bedside. Meriadec, Daubrac and the artist lost no time in following the sergeant, who opened the conversation by saying:

“Was it not you who went up into the tower with a lady a few moments ago?”

The stranger turned a trifle pale, but curtly replied:

“May I ask what business that is of yours?”

“These gentlemen saw you crossing the square, arm in arm; mademoiselle, here, saw you ascend the stairs from the door of the room in which we are now standing.”

“And what of it?”

“Then you admit the fact?”

“Admit what? And what possible right have you to question me?”

“I want to know what has become of the lady?”

“She has left the church.”

“Alone? Without you?”

“Yes. If you don’t believe me, you can go up and see.”

“That is not necessary. I know where she is, and I am going to take you to her. We will see if you do not recognize her.”

These last words made a very evident impression upon the stranger, and certainly a by no means pleasant one.

“I think you must be jesting,” he said, in a less confident tone. “I should be obliged to you if you would explain more clearly. What do you want of me?”

“You will soon know, sir. Walk on ahead of me, if you please,” he added, pointing to the stairway.

“So be it. I yield, but I assure you that you shall pay dearly for this abuse of your authority. Where are you going to take me?”

“Only a short distance from here—to the Hotel-Dieu.”

“To the Hôtel-Dieu!” exclaimed the stranger. “Has any accident happened to—”

“To this lady?” sneered the sergeant. “Yes. Does the news surprise you?”

“A serious accident?”

“It is useless for you to pretend ignorance!”

“I assure you that I am so entirely in the dark that I beg you will take me to the lady as quickly as possible.”

“Are you in such very great haste? Have patience. You will not be kept in suspense long. Go on ahead of us,” he added, turning to the others, “and tell my men to open a way through the crowd.”

It had been difficult to convince him of the truth of the artist's assertions, but he was so thoroughly convinced now that he no longer doubted that he had captured a murderer. He even hoped that this capture would insure his promotion. Meriadec and Daubrac did not know what to think, but Fabreguette was highly elated.

“Well, I seem to have interfered to some purpose!” he chuckled. “Had it not been for me, that old stupid would still be gazing at the body of the victim, and the villain would have made his escape; but now, thanks to me, we have him safe.”

“Are you sure?” asked Daubrac. “This gentleman does not look in the least like an assassin.”

“Why not? Because he is dressed in the latest fashion? That is no proof whatever.”

“His composure certainly does not seem to be at all ruffled,” remarked Meriadec.

“He seems bold enough now, but wait until he is brought face to face with his victim.”

“Do you think they will allow you to be present?”

“Of course. I am the only eye-witness of the affair. My presence is indispensable,” was the complacent response.

They had now reached the outer door, and Fabreguette transmitted the necessary orders to the two policemen stationed there. Several other officers had arrived, for the news of the tragical event had spread through the neighborhood with the swiftness of lightning, and the nearest commissioner of police had been promptly notified, as is usual in such cases.

But the crowd had increased correspondingly, and the

officers had considerable difficulty in keeping back the curious during the short journey from the Rue du Cloître to the hospital.

The commissioner, arrayed in his scarf of office, was awaiting the party in the vestibule, and, after ordering the doors to be closed to keep out the crowd, he held a conference with the sergeant, who acquainted him with all the particulars of the affair.

During this conversation, Meriadec and Daubrac had an opportunity to examine the accused more closely than they had been able to do on the dimly lighted stairway. He appeared to be about thirty-five years of age, and had a very dark complexion. He was powerfully built, and wore long mustaches, though his beard was trimmed in military fashion.

“He looks like an army officer,” whispered Daubrac.

Just then the commissioner, who had listened attentively to every word of his subordinate’s report, entered an adjacent room, after giving orders for the gentlemen to follow him. When they entered it, escorted by the sergeant, they found the magistrate seated at a table, and the suspected man had begun the conversation without waiting to be questioned.

“Sir,” he said, with ill-suppressed anger, “I trust you will put an immediate end to a shameful and absurd persecution. Your subordinates have dragged me here like some common malefactor, and I have been unable to extort the slightest explanation from them. Will you be so kind as to tell me of what I am accused?”

“I will tell you whatever you may be ignorant of,” replied the magistrate, severely; “but I must first ask you to answer the questions I am about to put to you.”

“I foresee your questions. You are going to ask me, as the sergeant has already done, if I entered the tower of Notre Dame with a lady. Very well, I have not the slightest desire to deny it.”

“It would be impossible for you to deny it even if you wished to do so. You were seen to do it by several persons. What took you there?”

“The same desire that actuates other visitors—a desire to obtain a bird’s-eye view of Paris on a fine day.”

“Then you ascended to the platform on top of the south tower?”

“No, sir. The climb proved too severe for the lady who accompanied me, and we paused in the gallery that extends across the whole front of the church at the base of the two towers.”

“Did you remain there long?”

“Only a short time, on the contrary; certainly not over a quarter of an hour. The wind was blowing hard at the time, causing a very disagreeable draught, and the lady could not stand it, so she decided to come down.”

“I understand all that, but what I do fail to understand is why you did not do the same. Why did you remain in this gallery when it was so uncomfortable?”

The answer to this question was a long time in coming, but finally the stranger said rather reluctantly, and like a man who could find nothing better to say:

“The wind did not annoy me.”

The reply was so unsatisfactory that the two friends exchanged meaning glances.

“What!” exclaimed the commissioner, “you are walking out with a lady; you go up into a gallery with her; she is uncomfortable there, and wishes to leave it, and you allow her to depart alone! Confess that such a thing is highly improbable on the part of a man who seems to move in the best society, as you do.”

“Such was the case, nevertheless. She had her reasons for going without me.”

“What reasons?”

“I do not know.”

“And she left you thus abruptly and without telling you why? That is certainly very strange.”

“A truce to this jesting, sir! I certainly am not obliged to answer questions that seem utterly aimless.”

“You can at least tell me whether or not this lady was your wife?”

“I am not married.”

“And you fear to compromise the lady by explaining further. You refuse, I understand, to give her name?”

“Absolutely.”

“She is doubtless a married lady, and in maintaining this determined silence on her account, you pretend you are acting the part of an honorable man. That is all very well, but I warn you that your reserve will not prevent us from learning who she is.”

The stranger started slightly. The commissioner had touched a weak point, and he now added, in a more friendly tone:

“I shall know before the day closes, so you had better tell me the name—in confidence, of course. If you are not guilty, I will keep your secret, while if you persist in your silence—”

“Guilty of what? This is the tenth time I have asked this question. I certainly have a right to know before answering you. Once more, I ask you of what I am accused?”

“Of having murdered this woman.”

“Really, this is too absurd. I can scarcely believe you would jest in the exercise of your magisterial functions. I prefer to believe that I am the victim of a mistake that it is quite unnecessary for me to rectify. I shall wait until the error is corrected.”

“Then you absolutely refuse to give any explanation whatever?”

“More firmly than ever.”

The commissioner rose, made a sign to the sergeant, who stepped to a little door at the end of the room, and opened it.

“Step in here,” he said, turning to the accused. Then, addressing the three witnesses, he added:

“Will you have the goodness to follow me, gentlemen?”

The stranger walked to the door without betraying any sign of emotion, and entered an unfurnished room, in the center of which stood a large table, upon which lay a body covered with a cloth.

On perceiving this he paused, and said, coldly:

“Very well. I understand. You are going to bring me face to face with the dead. You might have spared yourself the trouble, sir, for it will not terrify me in the least.”

At a gesture from the commissioner, the sergeant lifted the cloth, and the form of the dead woman was disclosed to view. The stranger turned pale, and recoiled in horror, but he quickly mastered this instinctive repugnance, and hastening toward the body, he examined the disfigured features carefully, and said, as if speaking to himself: “Thank heaven, I do not know her. I thought for an instant that it was she. I was mistaken, thank God!”

There was a silence. The commissioner, whose plan had

failed, bit his lips; the two friends did not know what to think of this coolness, and even Fabreguette began to have his doubts

“I understand now,” repeated the accused. “You suspect me of having thrown this unfortunate woman from the tower. I do not know whether she committed suicide or whether some one pushed her off, but I am sure that I never saw her before.”

Instead of contradicting this assertion, the commissioner proceeded to examine the witnesses, first taking their names and addresses. Daubrac and Meriadec declared that they recognized the prisoner from having seen him cross the square with a lady on his arm, but that they were not equally sure that the dead body was that of the same lady.

Fabreguette repeated that he had witnessed the tragedy from the river bank, where he was fishing; that he had seen a man lift a struggling woman and fling her into space. But he had been too far off to distinguish the faces, and consequently could not swear that the perpetrator of the crime was the man arrested upon the tower stairs.

These depositions proved nothing, and the stranger listened to them with very evident satisfaction. Still, the commissioner would not admit himself beaten.

“You have heard the testimony,” he said. “These gentlemen are unwilling to take the responsibility of saying that you are the guilty party, but I shall unquestionably succeed in establishing this woman’s identity. Even if no visiting cards or papers should be found upon her person, she will certainly be identified at the morgue, where I am going to send her. I will not ask you her name, as you pretend not to know her, but I suppose there is nothing to prevent you from telling me yours. What is your name? Where do you live? And what is your profession?”

“I will answer none of these questions,” was the firm response.

“So be it. The judge of instruction will have no difficulty in discovering who you are.”

“I will perhaps tell him. To you, I will reveal nothing, particularly in the presence of these persons who have been the cause of my arrest.”

“Then there is nothing left for me but to send you to the depot. I will take you there myself. Sergeant, send for a carriage. You will afterward see that this woman’s

body is taken to the morgue as soon as possible. You, gentlemen, are at liberty to retire, but you must hold yourself at the disposal of the magistrate to whom the investigation of this case will be intrusted. You will probably be summoned to the palace to-morrow."

These words were equivalent to a dismissal, and the three witnesses immediately left the room; nor were they ungrateful for the opportunity to exchange opinions and impressions.

They paused on the portico for consultation, and soon found that all three of them held entirely different opinions in regard to the mysterious affair in which they had played such an important part.

Fabreguette persisted in the belief that the accused was the assassin; Daubrac declined to venture an opinion, and Meriadec seemed to think that the gentleman was the victim of a mistake. The surgeon, however, put an end to the discussion by announcing that the hour for his evening round had arrived, and they all parted in the most friendly manner. Fabreguette, without troubling himself further in regard to the consequences of the arrest, went to find the fishing line he had forgotten upon the bank, thus leaving Meriadec to his reflections.

And they were gloomy enough, for this unusually conscientious man had taken the affair deeply to heart, and greatly feared that he had aided in bringing about the incarceration of an innocent man.

The gentleman whom the commissioner had so summarily dispatched to the depot, had defended himself as any honest man accused of an atrocious crime would defend himself. It was very possibly only a case of suicide, and if the woman had really been thrown from the summit of the tower, the first thing to be done was to ascertain if the gentleman and the lady of the blue veil, were alone at the time of the catastrophe.

Meriadec, therefore, decided to complete, for his own satisfaction, an investigation that seemed to him much too hasty and superficial, and the idea of immediately paying a visit to the scene of the crime occurred to him.

Perhaps a desire to catch another glimpse of the Angel of the Bells had something to do with this resolve. One thing is certain, Rose Verdiere had charmed him, and he felt attracted toward her by a sentiment which he could

hardly define, but which strongly resembled the dawn of love.

It is almost ridiculous, at the age of thirty-eight, to fall in love at first sight, with a girl young enough to be your daughter, but the last of the Meriadecs possessed an extremely susceptible temperament—still another point of resemblance to Don Quixote, the redresser of wrongs, and lover of every fair Dulcinea who crossed his path.

His life, like that of his favorite hero, was destined to be spent in defending the oppressed, and adoring women who cared little or nothing for him.

He had been born in Concarneau, Brittany, of a father who wanted to make him a country gentleman, content to reside on his manor, and improve his lands; and this father had prevented him from following his natural inclinations. Young Meriadec would have made a splendid soldier or sailor, but he was obliged to be content to do nothing but hunt, ride, and dream of warfare and love. When he found himself his own master, he was too old to enter the army, and was consequently obliged to be content with traveling in quest of adventures that never presented themselves. In 1870, he enrolled himself as a volunteer, but no opportunity to win distinction offered itself, and he finally took up his abode in Paris, where he led the life suited to one of his tastes.

He sold his estates, deposited the proceeds in the Bank of France, and established himself in a modest house on the Rue Cassette, where he lived in retirement, attended only by a single woman-servant. His sole occupation consisted in seeking out the unfortunate, and relieving their wants, and it was while visiting the hospitals on this errand that he had made Daubrac's acquaintance.

As yet he had met only those ordinary cases of destitution which could be relieved without any greater trouble than an unloosening of his purse-strings, though he occasionally found an opportunity to risk his life by stopping a runaway horse, or leaping into the river to rescue some despairing creature; but this did not satisfy the thirst for self-sacrifice that consumed him.

He dreamed of impossible acts of heroism and abnegation; he dreamed, too, of loving and being loved; but up to the present time he had found no worthy object upon whom to lavish the wealth of affection that filled his heart.

In seeking another interview with Rose Verdiere, he also had a benevolent motive—that of discovering some means of assisting a man who was unjustly accused.

After Fabreguette's departure he accordingly directed his steps toward the Rue du Cloitre-Notre Dame. The excitement had in a great measure subsided, and the square was beginning to wear its usual aspect, though there were still a few persons lingering about the spot that the unfortunate woman had stained with her blood. Two policemen were still on guard at the entrance to the tower; and Meriadec said to himself that they must have received orders to prevent any one from coming in or going out.

Meriadec therefore concluded that even if the real culprit was still in the tower, he would be unable to leave it without giving the explanation the officers would be sure to demand; and that these same officers, on the other hand, would not allow him, Meriadec, to enter without a permit, which he was unwilling to ask of the commissioner. He was about to renounce his scheme, therefore, when he suddenly recollected that there was another entrance to the staircase inside the church. He accordingly retraced his steps, entered the church, and perceiving to the right of the nave a notice indicating the way to the tower, he took it without loss of time.

The guards stationed in the street did not see him; and a few seconds brought him to the grating, which he was glad to find closed. Had it been open he would not have dared to enter the keeper's room, while his ring would be almost certain to bring the young girl, who would hardly refuse to talk with him. She came in answer to the bell, as he had anticipated, and she promptly opened the grating for him; but he was struck by the change in her appearance. She was very pale; and one could see by her swollen eyes that she had been weeping.

"What is the matter, mademoiselle?" he asked, almost affectionately.

"Nothing," she murmured, "only this affair has upset me completely. Oh, sir, is it true that the poor woman—"

"Too true, alas! I have seen her body, shattered by the fall."

"And was she thrown down by her companion?"

"I am inclined to think so; but though he has been arrested, he may succeed in exculpating himself. I hope

so, for his sake, and also for yours, mademoiselle; for if he is guilty, the authorities may hold your father responsible for what has happened."

"That is what I am very much afraid of; and if he should lose his place, I don't know what would become of us."

"You will always have one friend," said Meriadec quickly, "and I beg that you will count upon me. All I possess is at your disposal, and I stand ready to defend you against all who may seek to injure you. Excuse me, a comparative stranger, for saying this, and pray do not impute to me any but the most honorable intentions. Daubrac will tell you that I am an honorable man, utterly incapable of betraying any confidence you may see fit to place in me."

The girl frowned slightly at this unexpected declaration; but Meriadec's honest face reassured her, and she answered with a smile:

"I thank you, sir, and I shall not hesitate to call upon you should necessity require. But was it to merely offer me your services that you took the trouble to climb up here?"

"No," was the frank reply. "I wish to go up into the tower and satisfy myself that there is no one there. That is what the sergeant should have done in the first place. Will you allow me to go up?"

"Yes, on condition that you say nothing about it, for I might be blamed for the same violation of duty as my father."

"No one shall even know that I have spoken to you. I entered by the door opening from the nave, and I shall leave the building in the same way. I will report as I come down."

As he spoke, he began to climb the stone steps, hoping, of course, that his expedition would not be entirely fruitless; but he was by no means prepared for the surprise that awaited him at the top of the first staircase. Meriadec, thanks to the long legs with which nature had endowed him, made the ascent very rapidly; so rapidly, in fact, that he was obliged to pause and take breath on reaching the first gallery. This gallery was deserted; and, as the gentleman had said, the wind whistled through it with very uncomfortable violence.

Meriadeec ventured upon it, however, after a short pause, and on reaching the middle of it, he leaned back against the balustrade to glance up at the top of the towers; then, seeing no one there, he turned to look down at the square, where little groups of people were still standing.

The sight interested him but slightly; but as he leaned over the granite railing, he made a singular discovery. Directly under him, clinging to the sharp corners of a projecting ornament, was a blue veil—the blue veil worn by the lady he had seen passing through the square on the arm of the accused; and Meriadeec instantly asked himself how this veil could have come there. The crime having been committed upon the platform of the south tower, the veil would naturally have fallen from the same side as the unfortunate victim; and even supposing that it had become detached during her fall, the wind, which was blowing from the north, would not have taken it to the west side of the church.

However this might have been, the veil was an important article of conviction which Meriadeec thought it advisable to secure.

His cane had a crooked handle, and, by maneuvering adroitly, he finally succeeded in detaching and lifting the veil. All gauze veils are very much alike, and a close examination of this one told him nothing except that it was a new one which had probably been purchased that very day, for a tiny tag was still attached to the rubber cord which served to fasten it on the bonnet—a tiny tag upon which the price of the article was written.

Meriadeec folded the veil carefully and placed it in his pocket, mentally resolving to show it to the investigating magistrate; then, encouraged by his discovery, he resumed his journey of exploration.

The staircase he had just climbed is in the north tower, and to continue his journey it was necessary for him to cross the gallery and continue the ascent by way of the south tower—the one in which the famous bells hang.

Meriadeec was about to enter it when he beheld, upon the lower step, a child, whose appearance astonished him. This child, who stared wonderingly at him, was probably about eight or nine years of age. He wore a shabby cap and a gray blouse, but his face was not that of a Paris *gamin* by any means.

He had the fair complexion of a carefully reared child; large, bright blue eyes, beautiful golden hair, cut square across his forehead, and a haughty air that did not harmonize with his costume.

“What are you doing here?” asked Meriadec, in astonishment.

The child blushed, drew himself up proudly, and replied in words which the baron did not understand, but which, from the tone in which they were uttered, must have been rather insulting ones.

“What language are you speaking, my little friend?” asked Meriadec gently, more and more amazed.

“My own,” replied the lad, in French, “but I know yours, too, and I forbid you to call me your friend. I don’t know you.”

Meriadec was amazed beyond expression; but he began to suspect that this strange little fellow could give him some very useful information, perhaps even solve for him the mystery he was so anxious to clear up, and he resolved to make a conquest of him by kindness if possible.

“Don’t take offense, my little man,” he said pleasantly. “I am looking for a lady and gentleman who went up into the tower a little while ago. Perhaps you will tell me if you have seen them?”

“I have only seen papa and mamma,” replied the child. “I came here with them; but I was too tired to go any further.”

“Then they are still up there?”

“Yes; I am waiting for them. Mamma told me to amuse myself by looking at the big bell; but I soon got tired of that. I have seen a much larger one in my own country—in Russia.”

“You are a Russian, then?”

“Yes. It surprises you because I am dressed like a Paris *gamin*, but I only disguised myself for the fun of the thing. It is your carnival time, papa told me. He was mistaken, and I have had no fun at all; but this evening I will put on my pretty new suit again.”

Meriadec was petrified with horror and astonishment. It seemed plain that this poor child’s parents had brought him here with the intention of abandoning him, and that the father had thrown his wife from the platform above. This wretch certainly could not be the man the commissioner of

police had just sent to the depot, as the couple Meriadec and Daubrac had seen had no child with them. What ought he to do? It was impossible to tell the lad that his mother had just been murdered, and by whom? The kind-hearted baron resolved to do that only as a last resort; but he did not abandon his hope of discovering the murderer, who probably had not yet found an opportunity to reach the street.

"They will not stay much longer," he said in his gentlest tones. "Would you like to go with me to meet them?"

The child eyed Meriadec sharply.

"Who are you?" he asked. "I won't walk about with everybody."

"I am the Baron de Meriadec."

"Oh, then you are a gentleman. I will go with you."

"Thank you for your confidence in me," replied the worthy Breton, who had not yet recovered from his surprise at hearing a child of nine years speak in such a manner.

He allowed the child to precede him, and had not a little difficulty in keeping up with him, so lithe were the young Russian's movements. They found no one upon the platform. Meriadec was not disappointed, for he did not suppose that the murderer had remained there; but the child turned pale, and his eyes filled with tears.

"Mamma! what has become of mamma?" he murmured.

Meriadec had not the heart to tell him the truth.

"She is looking for you, probably," he replied. "I will bet almost anything that you didn't remain in the place where she left you."

"That is true. I went all through the big room where the bells are. I even got lost, and had a great deal of trouble in finding the door where I went in."

"Oh, well, your mamma must have thought that you had gone down-stairs, and she has probably done the same. We shall doubtless find her below at the church door."

"Then take me where you think she is as quick as you can," begged the child.

Meriadec needed no urging, but hastened down-stairs with the boy, who manifested no further distrust of him. A few words acquainted Rose with the situation of affairs,

and in five minutes they had reached the outer door of the church.

The child, seeing that his mother was not there, began to weep bitterly; and Meriadec tried to console him by saying affectionately:

"Don't cry, my little friend. I will take you to your mother's house. Where does she live?"

"I don't know. We arrived in Paris only last night."

"What was the name of the street?"

"I didn't notice. I was asleep when we got there, and I did not wake until noon to-day; and we went out immediately afterward."

"But you would recognize the house if I should take you to it, would you not?"

"I think so."

"Well, we will look for it together. You are not afraid of me now, I hope."

"I am not afraid of any one."

"Then you will not refuse to go home with me and rest until I can make arrangements to start out with you in search of your home?"

"No; only I am so tired that I can not walk any further. I am hungry, too."

"We will take a carriage; and I can give you something to satisfy your hunger when we reach my house," replied Meriadec. "If we do not succeed in finding the house, we will resort to some other means. What is your name, my dear?"

"Sacha."

"I mean your family name?"

"I have no other. That is the Russian for Alexander,"

"And what is your mother's name?"

"Xenia. She is a countess."

"Xenia; that is her Christian name, of course. But your father, what is his name?"

"Paul Constantinowitch."

"Still another Christian name," thought Meriadec. "Evidently this is all the poor little fellow knows; and it is useless for me to question him further."

He hailed a passing carriage, entered it in company with Sacha, and told the coachman to drive to the Rue Cassette. He at first thought of taking the child to the office of the commissioner of police, but he finally resolved to conduct

the investigation unaided—to discover the assassin, avenge the dead woman, and secure for the orphan lad the fortune of which a cruel father probably wished to defraud him. The child fell asleep upon the baron's shoulder. He was sleeping so soundly when they reached the Rue Cassette, that Meriadec was obliged to carry him into the house in his arms; and he accomplished this feat without waking him.

“At last I have found something to give me an interest in life,” he said to himself as he ascended the stairs. “There is nothing wanting now except a wife to love me.”

CHAPTER II.

A JUDGE OF INSTRUCTION is always an important personage in France, for it is he who plays the leading rôle in all criminal cases. The fate of the accused is in his hands; and he is endowed with absolute independence of action. But when this magistrate is a man of distinguished birth, acknowledged talent, as well as integrity, he is a still more important personage, and even his superiors in office recognize his authority.

This was the case with Hugh de Malverne, the scion of an ancient family, the possessor of an income of eighty thousand francs, and the husband of a charming wife whose salon was one of the most popular in Paris.

This model magistrate had all the qualities necessary to insure the successful discharge of his difficult duties—an absolute impartiality, unvarying coolness, and remarkable discernment.

For all consequence, he was generally selected for the investigation of unusually difficult and delicate cases—like that of the tragedy of Notre Dame.

He had been promptly notified of it, and at noon, on the day following the crime, he was in his office at the palace, ready to question the accused and hear the witnesses who had been summoned that same morning. While waiting for them to make their appearance, he listened to the facts of the case as related by the commissioner of police, and seemed by no means pleased with the report rendered.

“It seems to me that you have not acted very wisely in

this matter," he said, coldly. "It may be that you have discovered the culprit, and it may be that you have made a great mistake in arresting this man. There is nothing to prove that he is the culprit, nor even to prove that any crime has been committed, as this is very possibly a case of suicide. You should have lost no time in examining every nook and corner of the church. In that case, you would be sure that no one was concealed there, for others beside the accused may have ascended the tower."

"Search was made, sir," replied the commissioner, respectfully. "I superintended it myself, after imprisoning the man who refused to tell his name."

"That was too late. The other man had plenty of time to make his escape."

"Pardon me, sir; I stationed a guard at the foot of the staircase, and am certain that no one left the tower after I did. The keeper's daughter will also testify to this fact. I examined all the upper part of the church carefully—the towers, galleries, and roofs—and found nothing!"

"And was there no sign of any struggle on the platform from which the woman fell?"

"None whatever. Besides, the attempt must have taken her by surprise. According to the testimony of the artist who witnessed the scene from a distance the woman, who was leaning upon the balustrade at the time, was seized around the waist and thrown headlong into space before she had an opportunity to defend herself. The only thing of a suspicious nature that I could discover was an open door—a small door in the narrow gallery that encircles the roof of the nave. It seems that this door was always kept locked; but I can not see how a man could reach it in the tower. He would certainly be obliged to take a fearful leap."

"But admitting that he could reach it, where would he take him?"

"To an inner stairway built in the wall on the north of the nave, and ending at a door behind the choir."

"Then the culprit might have made his escape in that way, you think?"

"It seems to me very improbable."

"If it were barely possible, it would cause me to feel strong doubts of your prisoner's guilt. In fact, thus far, there is only circumstantial evidence against him."

"But circumstantial evidence of the strongest kind, sir. It seems to me that his refusal to tell his name is in itself almost conclusive proof of his guilt."

"He refused to tell it to you, but he perhaps will not refuse to disclose it to me. He may have his reasons for being unwilling to reveal the truth except to the judge of instruction. He certainly is not so unsophisticated as to suppose that the authorities will not succeed in discovering who he is; and he will tell me, because he can trust me to keep his secret if his innocence is established. From your description of him, I judge that he must be a man of the world."

"I think so; but he took a strange precaution before leaving home yesterday. They searched the prisoner, as usual ~~when~~ he reached the depot, and no pocket-book or visiting-cards or papers of any description were found upon his person—nothing but about twenty louis in his vest-pocket. It looked very much as if he had anticipated this arrest, and taken measures to preserve his incognito."

~~That~~ is singular, I admit, but by no means conclusive. and ~~about~~ the lady?"

"She had on some quite valuable jewelry; but there was not a penny of money or a scrap of writing anywhere about her. She was well dressed; her under-clothing was of the finest kind, and engraved upon her watch-case was an initial surmounted by a coronet. Her hands were white, and her feet small, and well shaped. Her face was disfigured beyond any possibility of recognition."

"Still, her body should be sent to the morgue."

"It has ~~been~~ there since early this morning. It has drawn a crowd, I hear; but no one has recognized her."

"How old should you suppose her to be?"

"Thirty-four or five."

~~Do~~ you think her companion was her husband or lover?"

"Everything seems to indicate that he was a lover."

"But there is a husband, probably; and this husband will speedily discover his wife's disappearance. It is not impossible that he may come to the morgue, for he will see an account of the affair in the papers."

"Yes, if he is in Paris; but I should not be surprised if the woman is a foreigner. Her clothing is rich, but it is

wanting in *chic*; and the letter engraved upon her watch is an X."

"Xavier is the only name in our language that commences with an X.; at least the only one I can think of, and Xavier is a man's name. Have you made any inquiries in regard to the witnesses I have summoned?"

"Yes, sir. One is a surgeon at the Hôtel-Dieu, a very industrious and clever young man, they say, highly esteemed by his superiors in rank, and a great favorite with his comrades. The other is a Breton of noble descent, an eccentric sort of person, who has resided in Paris several years. He leads a very exemplary life, and enjoys an excellent reputation in the locality in which he resides."

"These are the persons who saw the couple crossing the square. But how about the third, the one who pretends to have seen the crime committed?"

"He is a penniless painter, who lives in a shabby den in the fifth story of a house on the Rue de la Huchette; but he does not seem to be an ill-disposed person by any means."

"What you say would hardly warrant me in accepting his testimony without reservation; and the charge seems to rest entirely upon his testimony, for if he had not told a story which may be solely the work of his imagination, every one would feel satisfied that this was a case of suicide."

"That is true, sir, but he seems to be perfectly honest; besides, what interest could he possibly have—"

"The desire to secure notoriety; besides, he may have been mistaken, at that distance. I will question him, however; and it will not take me long to discover whether or not his statements are worthy of confidence. But I am first going to give the accused a hearing, and after I have done so, I believe I shall know what to think of this affair. Have you anything more that you wish to say to me?"

"Nothing, sir, unless it be to add that the keeper of the towers neglects his duties in an inexcusable manner. If he had not been intoxicated, he would not have forgotten to close the grating at the foot of the stairway, in which case we should know who entered and who left the church; and if the investigation should prove a failure, it will be Verdier's fault."

"You had better report his neglect of duty, and request his removal. I will hear the daughter's testimony after

that of the other witnesses. Now, sir, I will detain you no longer. I have sent to the depot for the prisoner. As you pass out, will you have the goodness to tell the soldier on guard at the door of my cabinet, to send the prisoner in as soon as he arrives, and to send him in alone? His guard can wait outside."

The commissioner bowed and departed, leaving the judge alone with his clerk, who was mending his pens in a corner. This clerk was a kindly old man, who had grown gray in the harness, but who performed his modest duties mechanically, and took very little interest in the questions and answers he recorded.

"You need not begin writing until I give the signal," M. de Malverne remarked to him. "It is not impossible that the accused will vindicate himself almost immediately; and in that case, there will be no further investigation."

"Very well, sir," replied the clerk, with the utmost indifference.

Just then the door opened. A gentleman entered alone, and advanced slowly toward the table at which M. de Malverne was seated.

"What, Jacques, is this you?" cried the magistrate. "What under the sun put into your head to burst in upon me at the palace just as I was going to examine a prisoner? Ah, I have it! You have come to apologize for not dining with us yesterday. We waited for you until eight o'clock, and my wife was furiously angry with you. I believe she is still, in fact."

The gentleman whom the judge had just addressed so familiarly by his Christian name, started back in surprise on recognizing M. de Malverne, and stammered out:

"What! it is you who—"

"Yes, it is I. Were you expecting to find my wife in my cabinet?" asked the magistrate, laughing heartily at his friend's discomfiture.

And as his friend still appeared stupefied and unable to utter a word, the judge added:

"Come, explain. You must have had some object in coming here; and I judge from your manner that it must be a matter of grave importance. I will listen to what you have to say, though I am very busy just now. In fact, I am surprised that you obtained admission. But you did quite right to insist. A friend has the first claim upon

one, after all, so speak, my dear fellow. In what way can I be of service to you?"

Then, seeing that his friend evinced no intention of responding to this invitation, he exclaimed:

"Oh, I understand. You expected to find me alone. That can be easily managed. Leave us, Pilois," added M. de Malverne, turning to his clerk. "I will call you when I need you. Do not go far."

The good man hastily obeyed.

"Now we are alone," the judge continued, "and you can say what you have to say without the slightest reserve. In the first place, tell me why you wear this air of consternation. What has happened?"

"You can not possibly be ignorant," replied Jacques, with an evident effort.

"But how the deuce should I know? I blessed you roundly last evening for disappointing us, I can tell you. Odette declared that you must at least have broken your leg, for you are usually a model of punctuality. We expected a line of apology from you this morning, but none came. My attention was diverted, however, by a very strange case that was placed in my hands for investigation this morning; and I had to fairly bolt my breakfast and hasten to the palace. The case is a very curious one, and it may prove to be of very great importance. I am now expecting a man accused of murder. I had just sent to the depot for him. The door opens, and I think he is about to make his appearance, when, lo and behold, you enter. You must admit that I have reason to be surprised, and to ask you to solve the mystery."

"The man you are expecting; the man who was arrested yesterday; *I am the man!*" stammered Jacques.

M. de Malverne changed countenance, and looking searchingly at his friend, said:

"Are you jesting, or can it be that you have gone mad?"

"Neither the one nor the other. If you don't believe me, summon the guard who just took me from the depot and brought me here handcuffed."

"You spent the night in prison? Why didn't the idea of sending for me occur to you?"

"It did, but I rejected it. I felt sure that I should be released to-day, after my examination; and I preferred to

conceal this absurd adventure from you. I had no idea that the judge of instruction would prove to be you."

"And very fortunately; for you can, of course, tell an old friend and school-mate all, while it might cost you something to reveal the whole truth to one of my colleagues. I think you did quite right to disclose nothing to the commissioner of police. In a case like yours one can not be too prudent, particularly if a lady's honor is at stake."

"Then you have heard the facts of the case already?"

"Yes, in detail. The commissioner just made his report. I know, too, that you refused to answer any of his questions, and even to tell him your name. I had no difficulty in understanding why, even before I knew that you were the person concerned. I am fully satisfied now. The lady who was with you is married, and the safety of her reputation is the first thing to be considered. I should do precisely as you have done if I were placed in similar circumstances. But your generosity might have cost you dear. To allow one's self to be accused of murder rather than compromise a lady is certainly heroic."

"Then you do not suspect me of having committed a murder?"

"No, certainly not. I know you too well to suspect you of any crime whatever. Such a thing as an examination need not be thought of, now; and I congratulate myself upon having sent away my clerk. We can sit down and talk, now, like two old friends. Take a seat; I do not offer you a cigar, because it is not customary to smoke here. I don't see that it would lower the dignity of the magistrature myself, but that seems to be the general opinion."

M. de Malverne's tone was eminently reassuring; and yet his friend remained thoughtful and preoccupied. He evidently comprehended that the judge, though certainly most favorably disposed toward him, was not likely to confine himself to these affectionate remarks, but would ask him some embarrassing questions sooner or later.

These expectations were speedily realized.

"Come, you must give me some insight into this unfortunate affair before I send you home," M. de Malverne continued. "I fancy you will not be sorry to get there after a night spent at the depot."

“I must say that the past twenty hours seemed well nigh interminable.”

“There is one comfort, however, your name does not appear upon the register; and no one will ever know that Jacques de Saint-Briac, Captain of Cavalry, honorably discharged, spent the night at the prefecture depot like a common malefactor.”

“Then you do not intend to tell the commissioner of police, who arrested me?”

“Certainly not. He is a subordinate, and I am not accountable to him. Indeed, I am accountable only to my own conscience for my actions. I have a perfect right to throw the papers into the fire, and say to you, ‘Go in peace.’ I even have a right to invite you to dine with me this evening—a right of which I now avail myself.”

“I can not come.”

“Why not? Odette will be delighted to hear the story of your mishaps from your own lips, if you will consent to favor her with it. But now explain to me how the parties who pointed you out to the police could have mistaken you for the real culprit, for there can be no doubt that there is a culprit.”

“I don’t understand how it came about. I don’t, upon my word of honor! I was arrested on the tower stairway, taken to the Hôtel-Dieu, and shown the mutilated body of a woman I had never seen before. I was then told that I was accused of having thrown her from the top of the tower. What could I say in answer to such a charge. I had not seen the fall, and I could not, in honor, divulge the name of the person who had gone up into the tower with me.”

“Of course not. But confess that it was a strange fancy to ascend the tower of Notre Dame to chant a lover’s duet.”

“It was a whim of my companion. We started for the Jardin des Plantes, by way of the quays, but she thought we should be less liable to interruption on the tower, for there seemed to be no one there at the time.”

“Your divinity must be a whimsical creature. When you see her again, I advise you to enlarge upon the position of imminent peril in which she placed you. Had you been sent before any other judge of instruction, I hardly know how you would have got out of the scrape. But go on

with your story. When you went up in the tower didn't you meet the keeper on the stairway?"

"We saw no one except a young girl, who said nothing to us. There is a grating at the foot of the tower stairway, you know; but that was open, and we reached the gallery over the rose window in the front of the church without any incident worthy of mention."

"And you stopped there? The lady was tired, I suppose?"

"No, that was not the reason. In looking up, I saw the heads of two persons above the balustrade that crowns the summit of the tower."

"The heads of a man and a woman?"

"I think so; but I can not swear to it, as I only caught a glimpse of them."

"They may have seen you, and had their reasons for wishing to avoid notice."

"That is quite possible. I have thought since that this man must have been the murderer; but at the time I thought only of the impossibility of going any further without finding ourselves face to face with these people."

"You must have lost your senses, indeed, not to have foreseen such an encounter. Twenty or more persons ascend the tower of Notre Dame every day, especially when the weather is fine, and yesterday was superb. So you remained in the gallery, or rather, *you* remained there, for the lady departed by herself. Why didn't you go down together?"

"My dear Hugh, there seems to be some strange fatality in this most unfortunate affair. My companion on leaving home had purchased one of those thick blue veils that Englishwomen affect. While on the gallery she lifted it, and the wind, which was blowing strongly at the time, blew it away."

"One of the slight misfortunes that often befall happy lovers," laughed M. de Malverne. "The course of true love never did run smooth, you know."

"It was an irreparable misfortune in our case. How could the lady continue her promenade with her face uncovered. We might, of course, have taken a carriage; but it would be no easy task to find one, as they are rare in that part of the town. So, by mutual consent, we decided to part immediately. She hastily descended, and a quarter

of an hour afterward I did the same. It was unfortunate that I waited so long, however, for I was arrested on the staircase. You know the rest."

"Perfectly; and now I understand what took place. While you were being taken to the depot, the scoundrel who committed the crime, and who had afterward concealed himself somewhere, made his escape by the stairway that ends just back of the choir. The idiots who arrested you did not think of making any further search until it was too late. Ah, well, I can now assume the responsibility of setting you free, especially as there is nothing to prevent you from telling me the name of the lady."

"Tell you the name of the lady!" exclaimed M. de Saint-Briac. "Why, you know very well that I can not do that. I would rather go back to prison than divulge her name."

"To the commissioner of police," replied M. de Malverne, "and you are quite right. He would have embodied the name in his report. But telling me is a very different matter. The formal investigation is ended, or to speak correctly, it was never begun; and it is not a magistrate who asks you the question, but a friend."

"You still feel some doubt, then?"

"No, not the slightest. I believe you to be utterly incapable of falsehood. But in giving the necessary orders for your release, I assume a great responsibility; and I ask you this name simply to quiet my conscience. You must understand that the vital point is to establish the fact that the woman you are accused of killing is still alive."

"And how is that fact to be established, pray? By having her summoned here and questioning her yourself? I would rather allow myself to be condemned to death than see her obliged to appear in this cabinet."

"But I should not be absolutely obliged to resort to such a procedure. If you would consent to say it is Madame So-and-So, who resides on such a street, at such a number, I could make the necessary inquiries in a quiet way."

"You would not be much the wiser in that case, my dear Hugh, for if I were guilty, and wished to clear myself, I should only have to name some other lady, and you would be none the wiser."

"That would be an infamous act, of which I know you

are utterly incapable. But really, I fail to see why you should object to telling me the truth. Can it be that you doubt my prudence, or do you distrust my motives?"

"Not the least in the world. But you yourself admitted, just now, that an honorable man would feel compelled to maintain an absolute silence under such circumstances."

"Yes, if I were acquainted with the lady; for in that case I might meet her in society, and if she knew that I knew her secret, she would feel very uncomfortable, but—"

"Ah, well, then," replied the captain, after some hesitation, "suppose that to be the case; suppose, even, if you like, that you are intimately acquainted with her husband?"

"In that case, I should find myself in a very embarrassing position," laughed the judge of instruction. "But this is a mere supposition, in which I place no credence whatever. You and I frequent the same drawing-rooms, and among all the ladies we are in the habit of meeting, there is not one whom I can even suspect. Confess, then, that you have made this conquest outside of the circle in which we usually move. You visit at a number of houses where I am not received because I continue to hold the office of magistrate under a Republican *régime*."

Saint-Briac was silent, but his face betrayed deep emotion.

"Do you not know," continued M. de Malverne, "that it would be a comparatively easy matter for me to discover your secret? The police are at my orders, and I should only have to order a detective to *shadow* you, to learn all I wish to know."

"I am sure that you will not do that," said Saint-Briac, quickly, while a sudden pallor overspread his features.

"No, my dear fellow, I only wish to convince you that I deserve some credit for taking your simple word; and I confess that you wound me deeply by your refusal to tell me the name I wish to know. But heaven forbid that I should suspect you of an atrocious crime; you, whom I see every day, and whom I love as a brother. I am going to give orders for your release. That will be effected in about a quarter of an hour; then go home and make up your mind to dine with us this evening. My wife will scold you roundly; and you deserve it."

"What! you intend to tell Madame de Malverne about this unfortunate affair?"

“I have no secrets from her; and she conceals nothing from me.”

“But you certainly ought to spare my feelings. I have played such a ridiculous rôle in the affair.”

“I do not think so. On the contrary, you have conducted yourself in a most knightly fashion. Your chivalrous devotion verges upon heroism; and I am sure that Odette will admire instead of ridiculing you. But you must be longing to return to your pleasant rooms on the Avenue d’Antin, so I will give you your discharge,” said the judge, seating himself at his desk to fill out the required form.

Jacques de Saint-Briac was beginning to breathe more freely; but he had not yet entirely recovered from the terrible ordeal through which he had recently passed.

“It is done,” continued M. de Malverne. “Hand this paper to the superintendent of the depot, and he will release you without delay. I would gladly spare you the trouble, but the regulations require it; and this time you will not be obliged to cross the court-yard of the Sainte-Chapelle hand-cuffed. I will recommend you to the distinguished consideration of the Paris guard who is waiting to escort you back.”

As he spoke, he touched the bell upon his desk. A messenger entered, and after giving him the order to be transmitted to the soldier acting as escort, the judge inquired if the expected witnesses had arrived. Neither of them had yet appeared, for the very good reason that it still lacked an hour of the appointed time.

“It is my fault,” remarked the judge. “I thought the examination would be a lengthy one; but I concluded it in less than forty minutes, and consequently have plenty of time to accompany you to the depot. I had better say a word to the superintendent myself. I can get back here in time to meet the parties I have summoned.”

“But what is the use of hearing their testimony, now that you have set me at liberty?”

“What is the use? Why, I have no idea of abandoning the case. You are innocent, that is as plain as daylight; but there is a culprit, and I intend to find him. This culprit is the man who ascended the tower in company with the unfortunate woman you saw at the Hôtel-Dieu. It is necessary for me to hear the testimony of those who accused

you; but there will no longer be any question of you. Now follow me, my dear fellow, or rather give me your arm, so that every one may see that you are no longer suspected of any connection with the affair."

This programme was carried out. The two friends traversed the long corridors and court-yard, arm in arm, to the great astonishment of the guard, who had never seen a magistrate treat a prisoner in this way before. The surprise of the jailers was equally great; but the explanation between the judge and the superintendent took but a moment.

"I am a free man once more, thanks to you," said Saint-Briac, when the doors of the prison had closed behind them. "I shall never cease to be grateful for what you have done for me."

"I have only done my duty; and your name will not appear upon the prison register."

"I begin to fear that you will be compromised by your efforts to save the honor of my name."

"You need have no fears of that. I will see the procureur general to-day. I shall probably have to tell him that the person arrested was Jacques de Saint-Briac, a former captain in the Ninth, Cuirassiers, and my intimate friend, but I feel sure that he will approve my course."

"I am very sorry that you will have to tell him my name," said Saint-Briac, gloomily.

"You are certainly very hard to please, my dear fellow. You ought to be thankful to get out of this scrape so easily, for it might have cost you dear, and your companion as well."

"I know it, my friend, and I am not complaining, I assure you," replied Saint-Briac, sadly. "Forgive me for what I said just now, and rest assured that I intended no reflection on your judgment. Besides, I really have no cause for anxiety, for the two magistrates you are going to take into your confidence are men of honor."

"Yes; and they have more important business on hand than to endeavor to ascertain the name of the fair lady for whose sweet sake you were willing to be immured in a dungeon; so go in peace, and don't forget to take dinner with us this evening at seven o'clock."

"Don't insist upon it, I beg. I do not feel like myself."

It will take me a few days to recover from this strain upon my nerves."

"Nonsense! I know you too well to believe that you are as nervous as a woman. I begin to wonder why you are so loath to accept my invitation. Upon my word! one would suppose that you were afraid my wife would take you to task."

"What an absurd idea!" stammered Saint-Briac. "I only feared that I should be an unentertaining guest. But I will come, as you insist upon it."

"Well, now that I have your promise, I will leave you and go back to my cabinet, to hear the witnesses I summoned; for, as I said before, I have not given up the case, and we will at least make a search for the man who was on the top of the tower while you were flirting with your *inamorata* in the gallery below. His hasty disappearance proves that a crime was committed; for if the unfortunate woman had committed suicide, the scoundrel who was with her would not have made his escape by way of the roof."

"It will be a difficult task to find him, I fear. No one had a sufficiently near view of him to be able to identify him now."

"That is true; but you forget the important part the hand of God plays in such matters. The woman has been taken to the morgue; and it is not improbable that the culprit will be detected there. The slightest exclamation or change of countenance will instantly be noted by the detectives I have stationed there. Besides, inquiries are sure to be made. A woman does not disappear without some one's noticing the fact, especially a wealthy woman—and this one was covered with jewels. If she is a stranger in the city, she must have gone to some hotel on her arrival. We shall soon know which one. I will promise to keep you posted. *Au revoir*," M. de Malverne said, in conclusion, giving his friend a hearty shake of the hand.

Jacques de Saint-Briac watched him for a moment, then turned and walked slowly toward the massive gate-way that opens upon the Boulevard du Palais. Once outside the palace grounds, he paused to wait for a passing carriage, for he was in haste to reach home, and the Avenue d'Antin was a long way off.

Being thus engaged, he did not at first notice a gentleman who had stopped on the sidewalk a few feet from him,

and who was examining him closely. This gentleman held a shabbily dressed child by the hand. After a moment Saint-Briac turned, and recognized him instantly.

"So it is you, sir?" he said, dryly. "What business have you to stare at me in this manner? Are you surprised to see me free? I judge so, for though I have been released, it was certainly no fault of yours. It is to you that I am indebted for my arrest, I believe."

"You are mistaken, sir," replied Meriadec, coldly. "I may have contributed to it involuntarily, but I made no accusation against you, nor have I ever believed that you were guilty. I have been summoned by the investigating magistrate, and came here to testify in your favor."

"That is unnecessary, very fortunately," said Saint-Briac. "He knows that I am innocent, and has just set me at liberty."

"I congratulate you with all my heart; and I see, now, that you have been the victim of a mistake."

Then turning to the boy who was standing by his side, he said:

"Tell me, Sacha, do you know this gentleman?"

"No, I never saw him before," was the prompt response.

"I was sure of it," muttered Meriadec.

"Will you have the goodness to explain what all this means?" said Saint-Briac, curtly.

"It means that your arrest was a mistake. I was convinced of it before; but if the slightest doubt had lingered in my mind, this child's answer would have dispelled it. He has seen the real culprit; and if you were he the lad would not have failed to recognize you."

"I am really very much obliged to him," said the captain, ironically.

"You do very wrong to take offense at what I say," replied Meriadec. "I can not wonder that you have an unpleasant recollection of me; but though you may be under the impression that I believed you guilty of the crime, I repeat that I came here to defend you."

"That is needless, I am happy to say; and I beg that you will not prolong this conversation."

With this parting shaft, the captain bowed coldly, and walked rapidly away, leaving our worthy friend greatly perplexed.

This little incident had changed the situation entirely, for now that it was no longer a question of saving an innocent man, Meriadec had regained his liberty of action, and there was nothing to oblige him to tell the authorities any more than they asked him. On the other hand, he could not forget that the judge was expecting him, and that any failure to appear would result in great personal inconvenience if the magistrate should take it into his head to send the police for the delinquent witness. But the hour appointed for his examination was three o'clock, and as the bell of the palace clock was just striking the hour of two, he had plenty of time to take Sacha back to the Rue Cassette; for he was gradually returning to his first plan, which was to act alone, or aided only by Sacha, and to ferret out the murderer without the assistance of the police.

The question was to ascertain if Sacha would consent to this change of programme. Meriadec doubted it very much, for he already knew something about the character of the young Muscovite, who was really one of the most self-willed and obstinate children imaginable.

On waking, after a sleep of fifteen consecutive hours, he began by shouting out several Russian names, doubtless the names of the servants who attended him in his own house; then, seeing Meriadec's maid of all work appear, he flew into a furious passion, and swore at her roundly in excellent French.

After breakfast he insisted upon going out to purchase some new clothing. Meriadec had promised to take him to the establishment known as La Belle Jardiniere after the visit to the judge of instruction, and as he stood deliberating on the Boulevard, the child reminded him of his promise.

"Shall we soon get to the store where they keep clothing?" he asked.

"In a moment," replied Meriadec, who had just decided to take him there before returning home.

The establishment was only a short distance from the palace, and he had a full hour at his disposal; besides, Sacha's face had brightened up wonderfully after his protector's reply, and he seemed more inclined to talk, so Meriadec was anxious to take advantage of this fit of good humor to secure information for which he had heretofore angled in vain.

"How fluently you speak French," he remarked, as they walked toward the Quai de l'Horloge. "You must have had an excellent tutor."

"Tutors! I never could bear tutors!" cried Sacha. "They sent to Paris for one for me, but I tormented him so that he was glad to go away. It was papa who taught me French. Mamma knows French, too. They never speak Russian when they are together."

"Yes, I know that people of rank generally use the French language in your country. What town did you live in?"

"We live in the country; but I have been to Moscow twice."

"In what province did you reside?"

"In Tambow."

This was the first bit of definite information that Sacha had furnished, and it might prove very useful.

"What was the name of your château?" the baron asked.

"I don't know that it was a château. The place where we lived was called Verine. Our house was two versts from the village that belongs to mamma."

"So I have only to write to Russia to learn the name of the poor woman whose body is now resting in the morgue," thought Meriadec.

"Your mother was the Countess Xenia, you said," he continued.

"Yes," replied the boy proudly, "and her blood is as noble as the emperor's."

"And your father?"

"No. She is a descendant of Rurik; he is not."

"Then you must entertain a great deal of company at Verine. All the nobility in the neighborhood visit at your house, I suppose?"

"No; we have no company. Papa doesn't like it."

Meriadec was beginning to understand the situation of this strange household: a noble Russian lady married to a man greatly inferior to her in rank, and ostracized by her country neighbors on account of this *mésalliance*. This would harmonize well with the tragical *dénouement* of this ill-assorted union.

"And you spent the whole year there?" he asked.

"Mamma did; but papa often went traveling. He had

been away six months when we left Verine to come to Paris."

"What, didn't he come to Paris with you?"

"No. He met us at the station."

"And took you to a hotel, I suppose?"

"I don't know. We slept in a big house, where there seemed to be no one but ourselves. We went there in a carriage—in papa's carriage."

This new bit of information was a great disappointment to Meriadec. It would be useless to visit the inns in the neighborhood of the northern and eastern railway stations now. This house might be in an entirely different part of the city, and it seemed probable that the infamous husband had taken such precautions in advance as would render it well nigh impossible for any one to discover any trace of the arrival of the wife he intended to kill, and the child he meant to lose.

"Sha'n't we get to that store pretty soon?" asked Sacha.

"You can see it from here," replied Meriadec.

They had already reached the Pont-Neuf. Ten minutes afterward they entered La Belle Jardiniere. It proved to be no easy matter to suit the young gentleman. In fact, nothing would satisfy him but a complete and very elegant outfit.

This metamorphosis took time; and, on leaving the store, Meriadec saw that it lacked only a quarter of three. Not deeming it advisable to keep the judge of instruction waiting, he again started for the Palais de Justice, without exactly knowing what he should do with Sacha during the examination. He had about decided to intrust the child to the care of the soldier on guard at the door, when, on reaching the very spot where he had met M. de Saint-Briac, he found himself face to face with the man of the red cap.

"What! is this you?" exclaimed that unappreciated artist. "You have come to give your testimony. You might have saved yourself the trouble. Our magistrate has been unexpectedly called away, and our interview is postponed until to-morrow."

"So much the better," said Meriadec, delighted to regain his freedom.

"Suppose we pay a visit to the morgue. What do you say?" queried the artist.

Meriadec shook his head, and pointed to his little companion.

“What difference does that make?” cried the artist. “Take the little chap along, too. It will amuse him. Is the boy yours? Why, I had no idea that you were a married man.”

“I am not,” replied Meriadec a little crossly, “and the child is not mine.”

“I thought that he didn’t look like you. Come, we really ought to go to the morgue. That woman’s body has been on exhibition there since early this morning, and it must have drawn a crowd. I should like to see her again, for I scarcely had time to get a good look at her yesterday. Besides, I am curious to know if any one has recognized her.”

Meriadec felt loath to accept the invitation, for the idea of showing Sacha his mother’s body was most distasteful to him; but he said to himself that the test would be decisive.

“Come,” insisted Fabreguette, “I am sure that your friend the surgeon has paid a visit to the house of the dead long before this. He is a witness in the case; we, too, are witnesses, and the visit to the morgue is obligatory upon us, so to speak.”

“What is the morgue?” gravely inquired Sacha, who had listened attentively to the conversation.

“What! don’t you know? Where did the little ignoramus come from? You must be fresh from the country.”

“What business is it of yours if I am?” retorted the child, tartly. “How dare you speak to me in such a manner?”

“Pardon me, monseigneur,” said Fabreguette, sneeringly, “I did not know that I was addressing the scion of a noble race.”

Sacha received these ironical excuses unflinchingly, and said:

“You have not answered the question I did you the honor to ask you.”

“True, true, prince. The morgue is an inn where the dead rest temporarily until arrangements can be made to take them to the cemetery.”

“And I suppose you have no desire to visit such a place,” added Meriadec.

“Why, yes, I have. I never saw but one dead person.

That was one of our peasants who had drank so much brandy that he fell under the wheels of his *kibitka*. I was not in the least afraid, so I am sure I shall not be afraid here, so let us go to the Morgue."

"*Kibitka!*" repeated the artist. "Your Highness is a Russian. I thought so."

This jesting irritated Meriadec as much as Sacha's proud coolness surprised him, and he wondered if it would not be well to put an end to Fabreguette's raillery by yielding to the clearly expressed wish of the child. After all, it would be necessary to tell him of his mother's death sooner or later, and perhaps the sooner it was done the better.

"Well, are you going to take me to the morgue or not?" demanded Sacha, stamping his foot impatiently. "Is it far from here?"

"On the contrary, it is only a short distance."

"Then we shall have plenty of time for our walk afterward. Now that I have some tolerably respectable clothes on, I will go about the city as much as you like."

Meriadec, who had come to a decision, directed his steps toward the morgue, choosing the most direct route. As they crossed the square and turned into the Rue du Cloitre-Notre Dame, Sacha paused and said:

"Here is the little door by which we entered the tower yesterday. And here is the street by which we came," he added, pointing to the Rue d'Arcole. "We left the carriage on the quay, and papa told the coachman he need not wait for us."

"Hear! hear!" said Fabreguette, in a low tone. "I begin to understand."

Meriadec would have preferred not to take the artist into his confidence, but he perceived now, when it was too late, that it would be a difficult task to conceal the truth from his shrewd companion; and to prevent him from asking a host of questions which he did not care to answer before Sacha, he whispered:

"Not another word, I beg. When we are alone I will tell you what has happened."

At last they reached the morgue. A large crowd had assembled around the door, for it was generally known that the body of the woman who had fallen from the tower was on exhibition there.

"Let us take our place in the line," said Fabreguette.

Meriadec followed him. It was too late to draw back now, for Sacha would not have given up his anticipated treat without a struggle. The advance of the line was quite rapid, as the police did not allow the curious to linger long before the cases, so that Meriadec, borne onward by the crowd into the hall, soon perceived at the end of the first row of black marble tables, the body of the unknown woman.

Not one of her garments, nor a single article of jewelry, had been removed, but her face and head were a mere mass of bloody flesh.

The procession, of which our friends formed a part, passed up the right side of the hall, keeping close to the wall, while the persons who had already viewed the remains passed out on the other side of the room, so that at one time they were opposite a portion of it.

But Sacha suddenly tore his hand from Meriadec's grasp, and uttering a loud cry, would have dashed across the hall, if his companion had not prevented him from doing so by seizing him by the arm. The child struggled to free himself, and began to call some one in Russian. Meriadec could not, at first, distinguish who the person was, but felt sure it was some one in the crowd that was making its way to the door on the other side of the room.

"Let me go," cried Sacha. "It is he! It is my father!"

No one answered, but Meriadec fancied that the call was addressed to a tall, well-dressed gentleman, whose back alone was visible to our friend, and he was about to yield to the child's importunities, when one of the police stopped him, and said:

"What is the matter with the child?"

"He is afraid," replied Fabreguette, instantly comprehending the situation.

"Take him away, then," said the officer, rudely. "It is ridiculous to bring children here. You will do me the favor to get him out at once, you and your friend who is holding him by the arm."

Meriadec gladly availed himself of the permission, still holding fast to Sacha, who was struggling in the most frantic manner. Fabreguette followed him, and the policeman pushed them unceremoniously toward the door. Thus suddenly removed into the open air, Sacha looked around,

and saw not twenty yards from him, the gentleman he was seeking.

This gentleman, however, was hastening with all his might toward the carriages that were standing upon the quay. The baron, the artist and the child started in hot pursuit, but before they could overtake him, they saw him jump into a coupé that had advanced to meet him. The door was quickly closed, and the horse flew like lightning across the bridge that connects the city with the Isle Saint-Louis.

Sacha, pale with anger, shook his fist at the rapidly disappearing carriage, and cried savagely:

“Paul Constantinowitch, I curse you!”

“He is superb in this rôle,” muttered Fabreguette.

“We don’t often see children of his stamp here in Paris.”

Meriadec, overcome with consternation, knew not what to do.

“Take me home with you,” said Sacha, abruptly.

“Well said, young gentleman,” replied the artist. “I, too, will accompany you to the house of our friend, Baron Meriadec.”

The child made no response, but began to walk straight on, without troubling himself to ascertain whether he was going in the direction of the Rue Casette or not. His eyes flashed and the whole expression of his countenance had changed. He seemed to have grown a dozen years older in the last five minutes, and now carried himself with the manly air of a youth of twenty. Chance had put him upon the right track, for he directed his steps toward the left bank of the Seine. Meriadec and Fabreguette followed him closely.

“That was his mother we saw in the morgue,” said the artist, lowering his voice, “and the man who just ran away was her murderer. Am I not right?”

“You have guessed the truth.”

“Ah, well, we can not restore the poor woman to life, but we can try to avenge her. Shall we form a league for the purpose of securing the man’s arrest?”

“Yes, on condition that my friend Dubrac will join us. Come home with me, and let us hold a council of war. I have a plan to propose to you.”

CHAPTER III.

M. DE MALVERNE occupied a handsome house that belonged to him; a house with a court-yard in front, and a garden in the rear. The court-yard opened upon the Faubourg Saint-Honore, and the grounds extended to the Avenue Gabriel.

His wife, Odette de Benserade, was a charming woman, and the two years and a half of their married life had not been marred by even a passing cloud. She loved society, and entertained a great deal, but though many handsome and agreeable men frequented her salon, the only one who was admitted to the house upon an intimate footing was Jacques de Saint-Briac, Hugh's oldest friend, who had acted as best man on their wedding-day.

At about seven o'clock on the evening of the day of Jacques de Saint-Briac's examination, Odette, who had not seen her husband since morning, was waiting for him in her drawing-room, half reclining in an immense arm-chair, and apparently absorbed in a profound reverie. Her white hand was slowly waving a large Japanese fan to and fro, and her eyes were following the hands of the costly mantel clock, as they moved slowly around the dial. She was very pale, and the dark circles around her eyes showed that she had been weeping.

The moments passed and Hugh, who was generally so punctual, failing to make his appearance, she rang the bell, and when a footman appeared in answer to the summons, inquired if his master had returned.

"About half an hour ago, madame," replied the servant. "Monsieur is just finishing his toilet."

"Very well. Tell him that I am waiting for him here."

As soon as she was again alone, Mme. de Malverne rose, looked in the glass, wiped her wet eyes and tried to smile and assume a cheerful expression. She was only partially successful in her attempt, however, and she could not wholly repress a nervous start as her husband entered the room. His face was radiant, and hastening forward with arms outstretched to embrace her, he pressed a fond kiss upon her fair brow.

"How does it happen that you are so late, my dear?" she asked.

"I have a long story to tell you," replied the magistrate, rubbing his hands. "As you may suppose, a tragedy like that of the Tower of Notre Dame is not easily unraveled. I was engaged with it all the afternoon, and six o'clock found me still in the office of the procureur general."

"What case do you refer to?" faltered Mme. de Malverne.

"What! didn't you read the papers this morning?"

"Yes. I saw something in them about a suicide—a poor woman who flung herself from the top of the tower—"

"True. I recollect now, that they only spoke of the fall, and made no allusion to the crime connected with it—"

"What! the unfortunate woman—"

"Was thrown to the pavement below by a villain whom I fear we shall have great difficulty in finding. I will entertain you with a full account of the unfortunate affair while we are at dinner. I am surprised that Jacques hasn't made his appearance yet."

"Jacques!" exclaimed the young wife. "Have you seen him?"

"Yes. I invited him to dine with us this evening, and he accepted the invitation."

"But why did he fail to keep his engagement of yesterday?"

"I would rather leave that for him to explain. You will find it much more amusing."

"Amusing? I do not understand you."

"You will lose nothing by waiting a few minutes, for I am sure that he is not going to disappoint us a second time. All I shall tell you now, is that our friend Jacques, the wise, the virtuous, the irreproachable, proves to be quite a gay Lothario. At least, he is despairingly in love."

"What!"

"You are surprised, I see."

"A little, I must confess."

"Still, it is hardly to be wondered at. He is just at the age for a *grande passion*, and he is certainly handsome enough to turn any woman's head."

"Undoubtedly, but we see him so often that it seems hard to believe that he should be in love, and we not know it."

“There is a time for everything,” said the judge, laughing, “and Saint-Briac finds time to see his lady love, without neglecting his friends—and even to take long walks with her.”

“And it was one of these long walks that made him slight our invitation?”

“In part, but it was not entirely his fault, and when you have heard an account of his adventures from his own lips, you will certainly forgive him.”

“I certainly hope he will not feel obliged to tell me his story.”

“But he will, and indeed, it is absolutely necessary that he should. I certainly hope that you will not refuse to listen to his confession. If you do, he will be sure to think you are jealous of his devotion to another.”

Odette's face turned even paler as she quickly replied:

“Your jests are not in very good taste this evening, my dear Hugh. What makes you so unlike yourself to-day, and what pleasure can you possibly take in thus teasing me?”

“Come, come, don't be angry, my dearest. What I just said to you was unpardonable, I confess. You surely will forgive me, though. This has been such a disagreeable day that I felt rather out of sorts, and a little inclined to tease, but it is all over now, and—”

“Monsieur de Saint-Briac,” announced the footman.

“So you have come at last!” cried M. de Malverne, as the captain entered, hat in hand. “I was beginning to wonder if you were going to disappoint us again. I warn you that you are going to get a terrible scolding. Odette is a veritable virago, you know, and you will find it hard work to regain her favor.”

Saint-Briac shook hands with his friend, and bowed to Mme. de Malverne more ceremoniously than usual. He seemed embarrassed, and yet timidity was not one of his faults. He did not look like himself; indeed, so great was the change in his appearance that he seemed to have aged many years since the evening before.

“Dinner is served!” announced the valet, opening the folding doors that led into the dining-room.

“You are still a little agitated, I see,” laughed the magistrate, “but you will soon recover from the ordeal of

yesterday at the table. Offer your arm to Odette, and come out to dinner."

The captain obeyed, though not without an uneasy glance at Mme. de Malverne, and the husband followed them.

"Did you go straight home after leaving the palace?" inquired Hugh, after they had taken their seats at the table.

"Yes," replied Saint-Briac, almost timidly, for he foresaw other more embarrassing questions. "I returned home, and did not go out again until I came here."

"You must, indeed, have needed time for rest and reflection, after your trying ordeal. I was detained at the palace until after six o'clock. You think I was detained by the witnesses, probably. No, I spent all that time in arguing with the procureur general. You can have no idea of the difficulty I had in convincing him. It was no easy matter, I assure you. It went so far that I even offered to give up the case and place it in the hands of one of my colleagues."

"I foresaw this," stammered the captain, "and I am grieved beyond expression that you should be compromised for—"

"Console yourself. They finally consented to listen to reason, and gave me *carte blanche*. They agreed with me perfectly in regard to the unfortunate mistake made by the commissioner of police. He was summoned and treated to a scathing rebuke. The keeper of the tower will receive his dismissal to-morrow—as is only right—for his neglect of duty was the primary cause of the whole unfortunate affair."

Saint-Briac said nothing; but it was easy to see, both from his manner and his face, that he was on coals of fire. Mme. de Malverne seemed equally uncomfortable. Her face clouded, and she said with unmistakable impatience:

"Your conversation is probably very entertaining to yourselves, gentlemen, but it is far from amusing to me, as I have no idea what you are talking about; so you would infinitely oblige me by changing the subject."

"You are right, my dearest," said her husband promptly. "We will talk all this over after dinner, while we smoke, as you are so kind as to tolerate cigars in your cozy sitting-room. Now let us choose a more cheerful subject."

So he enlarged upon the beauties of the new opera house which was then in process of construction, passing after-

ward to the new plays and the latest bits of society gossip. But all his efforts to enliven the conversation were futile: the repast ended even more dismally than it began, and the dessert had scarcely been placed upon the table before Mme. de Malverne rose with significant eagerness.

Coffee was served in the boudoir; and as soon as the servant had disappeared, she looked searchingly at her husband and said:

“Will you now have the goodness to explain the mysterious conversation in which you indulged at the dinner-table?”

“Mysterious to you, my dear Odette,” was the magistrate’s smiling reply, “but not to our friend Jacques; and I prefer to allow him the pleasure of giving you the key to it.”

“What is the use?” said the captain, quickly. “I am sure that Madame de Malverne is not at all anxious for it.”

“You are mistaken, sir,” was the prompt reply. “I am very anxious for it. What misfortune has befallen you?”

“I will come to your assistance, my friend,” said Hugh, seeing that Saint-Briac showed no disposition to reply. “Learn, to begin with, that our friend has just spent twenty-four hours in prison, which is, I hope, sufficient excuse for not coming to dine with us yesterday.”

“In prison!” exclaimed Mme. de Malverne.

“Exactly, my dear; and he would be there still if he had had to deal with any other judge of instruction but me. Fortunately I have got him out of his scrape, though not without serious difficulty, as the charge was a grave one. He was accused of murdering a woman—that is all—a woman with whom he was seen to ascend the tower of Notre Dame. Now that I have broken the ice for you, Jacques, make a clean breast of it, and fear nothing; the most virtuous women always have a weakness for the erring.”

Odette, who had turned pale on hearing the word prison, was now quite herself again. The blood had returned to her cheeks, and there was no anger in the eyes she turned upon Saint-Briac.

“Is this true?” she asked, gently.

He had bowed his head while M. de Malverne was speaking, but he now lifted it again and replied, unhesitatingly:

"Yes, madame, it is true. I have narrowly escaped paying a severe penalty for an imprudent act; but I should have submitted to my fate uncomplainingly, knowing that one I love better than my own life had nothing to fear."

"Oh, no, she had nothing to fear," said Malverne, with a slightly ironical gayety, "for he would have allowed himself to be chopped in pieces rather than divulge her name. He would not even reveal it to me, who saved him, and who would certainly have kept his secret."

"He was right," said Odette, firmly.

"Oh, it is very easy for you to talk, my dear. You quite forget that this sublime resolve on the part of our chivalrous friend has obliged me to assume a heavy burden of responsibility; and he has good reason to congratulate himself on his escape."

"It was certainly hard to be mistaken for an assassin!" murmured Mme. de Malverne, with tears in her eyes.

"He got only his deserts, in my opinion. In the first place, he should not be trying to turn a married lady from the path of duty; and he admitted to me himself that his companion was a married lady. I might not have taken this stand ten years ago, but now it is natural for me to side with the husbands. Besides, when one loses one's heart irrecoverably, one should not bestow it upon an eccentric madcap who drags her lover up into a church tower. One of these days she will want him to go up in a balloon."

"She must have suffered terribly since yesterday," said Odette.

"Oh, she knew nothing at all about it while Jacques was in prison, and now she knows there is nothing to dread. You have seen her, I presume," added Hugh, turning to his friend.

"Yes," replied the captain, after a moment's hesitation.

"Then you have been guilty of another act of folly which I advise you not to repeat. You must deny yourself the pleasure of seeing her at least for a while. If you do not, your secret will certainly be discovered; and the detectives, who will be watching you, may denounce you to the husband."

"So the procureur general knows my name?"

"I was obliged to tell him. Besides, I warned you that I should not be able to keep it from them. I warn you once more, take your precautions accordingly. Your

"divinity must make up her mind to mourn your absence for a month, or to forget you."

"She must be utterly heartless if she can do that," murmured Mme. de Malverne.

"Wonder of wonders!" exclaimed Hugh, gayly. "Odette undertakes your defense, and I thought she would overwhelm you with reproaches, or at least preach you a long sermon. I congratulate you, my friend. But I have teased you enough; and I don't want to bore Odette, who seems to be thoroughly tired of the subject. Light your cigar and tell me what is going on at the club. I haven't been there for a week, and you go there every evening. Is Grebord still losing?"

"I believe so," stammered the captain.

"There is a man who deserves to lose every penny of his money. He has a lovely wife, and yet he spends his nights at the card-table, without troubling himself in the least as to how she consoles herself in his absence."

"Everybody is losing, I believe," said Saint-Briac; "and all our friends are beginning to lose heart. The hidalgo is winning enormous sums from them."

"The hidalgo?" repeated M. de Malverne, inquiringly.

"Yes, the Spaniard who was admitted to the club last month."

"Oh, yes, I remember. He has a peculiar name; something like 'Corbo,' isn't it?"

"His name is Pancorbo, and he calls himself a marquis, but he looks to me very like an adventurer."

"Still there can be no secret about where he comes from. The persons who proposed his name for membership are responsible for him, you know."

"But they may know no more about his past than we do."

"It is an undeniable fact that strangers secure admission into our clubs too easily. The one we are talking of is a fine-looking man, with remarkably polished manners, so far as I could judge the evening you pointed him out to me, when he was acting as banker at the baccarat table. He pays his debts and, above all, pockets his winnings, with inimitable grace."

"He is a capital player, unquestionably."

"I don't doubt it; but it is an easy matter to play well

when one is winning. I should like to see him lose a large amount."

"Ah, well, come and win it from him, then."

"You forget that I have not touched a card since I became a magistrate. My greatness stands in my way."

"For that very reason you ought to be lucky at cards."

"Like other unfortunate husbands," was the laughing reply. "Pardon me, my dear Odette," he added, seeing his wife frown slightly, "I can talk nothing but nonsense to-night, it seems to me. Our friend's escapade has turned my head. But what is the matter with you? Do you feel ill?"

"Yes: your talk has given me a frightful headache, and I feel sorely in need of rest."

"Then we had better leave you to yourself, especially as this tobacco smoke is likely to increase your headache. So, with your permission, my dear, we will finish our cigars out-of-doors."

"I have no objections. I think, too, that I shall not wait for you to return before I retire. I really do not feel able to sit up any longer."

"Hadn't I better drop in at Dr. Monval's as I pass, and ask him to come up and see you?"

"No, my dear, that is not necessary. A good night's rest will set me right. Good-night, gentlemen."

As she spoke, Mme. de Malverne extended her right hand to her husband, who pressed a kiss upon it, and her left to Saint-Briac, who contented himself with shaking it in an embarrassed way.

"How fragile women are!" said Malverne as he and his friend stepped out into the garden. "My wife is a veritable sensitive plant, and I see, now that it is too late, that I should not have told her of the dangers you have passed through. It was chiefly a desire to explain your absence of yesterday that led me to do it."

"I could easily have invented some excuse."

"Yes, I did very wrong; but there is nothing we can do now but make the best of it. Come, let us finish our cigars in the Champs Elysees."

Malverne led the way through the garden, opened the gate with a key which he took from his pocket, and the two friends had only to cross the quincunx to reach the main avenue. They walked along, side by side, for some

minutes without uttering a word; and they had reached the Palais de l'Industrie when Hugh suddenly remarked to his companion:

“ Jacques, you ought to marry.”

“ Marry!” repeated the captain, taken completely by surprise, “ and why, pray?”

“ Why, in order that you may, in future, avoid catastrophes like that of yesterday.”

“ I can avoid them, even though I remain a bachelor.”

“ You are very much mistaken. You will repeat your imprudence some fine day, and be caught. You have just had a narrow escape, and you can't imagine how much difficulty I had in stopping the investigation so far as you are concerned. I am now in honor bound to find the real culprit, and if I fail in this, there will be nothing left for me but to send in my resignation. Besides, tell me the truth now, wouldn't you be a hundred times happier than you are if you had married a wife like Odette?”

“ Yes, certainly,” replied Saint-Briac, with a furtive glance at his friend, “ but that was impossible.”

“ It depended entirely upon yourself a few years ago, I suspect. You knew Odette before her marriage; and I am thankful you did not enter the lists as a suitor, for you wore a uniform in those days; and her father, old General de Benserade, had a decided fondness for the military. You did not offer yourself. I did, and was accepted; and I congratulate myself upon my good luck every day of my life. But there are other charming women in the world; and if you desire it, I am sure that Odette will gladly help you to find a wife.”

“ I'll consider the matter,” stammered the captain.

“ Would you like me to speak to her about it?”

“ What! after telling her that my affections are already engaged?”

“ You must first cure yourself of your present infatuation, of course.”

“ Ah, well, when I have done that we will see; but for the present I beg that you will not broach the subject to your wife.”

“ Of course not, if you say so; but you have no idea of the perfect confidence that exists between two people that really love each other. It is absolute. Odette has never doubted me, and I have never doubted Odette. You are

the dearest friend I have in the world; but if you should come and tell me my wife was deceiving me I would not believe you."

"A very strange supposition, I must say," stammered Saint-Briac, a dull red flush mounting to his brow; "and really, I don't know what to make of you to-day. You seem to take a strange delight in wounding your friends."

"I certainly do it unintentionally, if I do," replied Malverne gayly; "and it is strange you should take offense at such an absurd supposition on my part. But I confess that I am not in my usual frame of mind. The absurd strictures of the procureur general vexed me, because I am not accustomed to them, probably. They haunt me, and I can not drive them out of my mind. Come, suppose we drop in at the club. It will divert my mind to watch the playing; and if watching the game does not serve to change the current of my thoughts, I believe I shall feel tempted to take a hand myself."

"It is barely ten o'clock, and I doubt if the playing has begun. I need no better proof of it than—"

"Than what! Why do you pause so abruptly, and what are you looking at?"

Saint-Briac did not reply, but stood with his eyes riveted upon a gentleman who had just alighted from a very elegant coupé, but who had no sooner done so that he was accosted by a very shabbily dressed man.

"Well?" continued Malverne, giving his friend's arm a little shake.

"I am watching the person I called the king of baccarat a few moments ago—the Marquis de Pancorbo."

"Yes, I recognize him now. He is talking with a rather disreputable-looking fellow—this noble marquis. I am not surprised that you look upon him as a rather suspicious character. What can he have to say to a person of that stamp? Ah, the conference is ended, and the noble marquis is about to enter his carriage again."

"He is going to the club, you may be sure of that; and he will arrive in advance of us. Suppose we turn here and walk down as far as the Place de la Concorde. The clubhouse is only a few steps from there, and I shall not be sorry to drop in, if only to satisfy myself that they are not discussing my mishap."

“How could they possibly have heard of it? Do you imagine that magistrates can not keep a secret?”

“Magistrates are men; and when they are married—You related my misfortunes to your wife, you recollect.”

“Oh, that was very different. You are an intimate friend, and I was absolutely sure of Odette’s discretion; but you may rest assured that they know nothing about it at the club.”

“But they certainly know that you have charge of the investigation of the case. Your name appears in the evening edition of ‘La France,’ which I have just read, and which publishes a long account of the Notre Dame tragedy.”

“Ah, well, if any one should take it into his head to question me, I shall answer him in a way that will cure him of any desire to try it again.”

On entering the main salon at the club-house, the first face they saw was that of M. de Pancorbo. There was already quite a little crowd of polite listeners around him, for he spoke French fluently, and without the slightest foreign accent.

“The stories you are telling us are certainly very interesting, marquis,” exclaimed one of his auditors; “but we are losing precious time. The altar is prepared, and they are waiting for you in the greenroom.”

“Do not let me detain you, then, gentlemen. I will follow you in a moment,” replied the hidalgo, courteously, leaving the group that had surrounded him.

The others hastened *en masse* to the room devoted to baccarat, and Malverne allowed himself to be swept on by the crowd. Saint-Briac, who was a short distance behind him, was about to follow, when to his great surprise, he saw the marquis coming smilingly toward him. He accordingly waited, and M. de Pancorbo opened the conversation by saying:

“You can’t think how delighted I am to see you here, sir.”

This beginning naturally increased the astonishment of Saint-Briac, who replied coldly:

“And why, sir! I, like yourself, am in the habit of visiting the club every evening.”

“You were not here last evening, and I scarcely expected to see you here to-night,” replied the marquis, still smiling.

“I was not aware that you took such an interest in me, and can scarcely believe that the joy you express at seeing me is sincere. We know each other but slightly, and you concern yourself about my absence as much as if I were a particular friend. You must have some object in speaking to me in this way, and I should like to know what it is.”

“You are entirely mistaken in regard to my motives, sir. It is only natural that I should rejoice at meeting you here after what happened to you yesterday.”

“What do you mean?” asked the captain, sharply.

“I thought you understood me, for I supposed you saw me yesterday when you left the church of Notre Dame in quite a numerous company. It was by the merest chance that I happened to be there. I had just paid a visit to the church, and was leaving it, when to my profound astonishment, I perceived you. You were in the custody of two policemen who were conducting you to the Hôtel-Dieu. It is not strange, however, that you did not notice me, for I was in the midst of the crowd, and you could have had no idea of seeing me at such a time.”

Saint-Briac could hardly control his consternation on hearing this unexpected announcement; but his agitation soon gave place to anger, an anger the more violent from the fact that he was obliged to repress it, for a scene in such a place must be avoided at all hazards.

“Sir,” he said, in a voice that was a trifle husky, “I was, indeed, arrested yesterday, through mistake. I was taken for a scoundrel who had murdered a woman by precipitating her from the top of one of the church towers. To secure my release, I had only to make myself known, but I should greatly dislike to have this absurd affair talked about, and if it should become known here, it will be through you; so you may govern yourself accordingly.”

“I might very reasonably take offense at the tone you have assumed,” responded the marquis politely, “but I can easily understand your annoyance, and shall content myself with calling your attention to the fact that if I had desired to spread the news of your arrest here, I should not have waited until you were set at liberty. I spent last evening here, and did not say a word about what I had seen. My allusion to the affair now, was due solely to the fact that it did not seem strictly honorable to me to leave you in ignorance of the fact that chance had put me in

possession of a secret I would scorn to betray. I thought I had acted the part of an honorable man, and it grieves me to hear threats when I certainly have reason to expect thanks. I will add, however, that all this does not alter my intentions in the least, and that you can depend upon my discretion."

M. de Pancorbo's words were so plain, his tone so firm, and his manner so frank, that they caused a revulsion of feeling in the captain's breast, and he asked himself if it would not be better to have this witness of his deplorable mishap for a friend than an enemy.

"You make me regret my too great hastiness, sir," he said, in a less aggressive tone. "I have no reason to blush for what has occurred; still, I shall be none the less obliged to you for keeping what is known to you alone a secret. I refused to disclose my name to the officers who arrested me. It happened, very fortunately, that the judge of instruction before whom I was summoned, proved to be a friend of twenty years' standing."

"This friend was Monsieur de Malverne, who just came in with you," remarked the marquis.

"You know him!" exclaimed the captain.

"I have seen him occasionally here, though he is a by no means frequent visitor; but, to my very great regret, I have never had the honor of an introduction to him. I am not surprised that you were restored to liberty this morning."

This conversation was suddenly interrupted by Hugh de Malverne, who called out from the door-way:

"Come, Jacques, I have been waiting for you ten minutes or more. The game is about to begin, and if you want to play, you had better make haste."

M. de Pancorbo, who was standing with his back to the speaker, turned and bowed in the most deferential manner; and Saint-Briac thus cornered, could think of nothing better to do than to explain the situation to his friend then and there.

"My dear Hugh," he said, "the Marquis de Pancorbo, here, happened to be in front of the church of Notre Dame just as the police were taking me to the Hôtel-Dieu. He has kindly refrained from speaking to any one about what he saw, but I think you will be glad to talk with him, as he knows that I am indebted to you for my release."

“Monsieur certainly did quite right to inform you of his knowledge of the affair,” was the magistrate’s prompt reply.

“Oh, I know very little about it,” exclaimed the marquis. “I heard some one in the crowd accuse your friend of having thrown a woman I had never seen from the tower. But the accusation seemed so absurd that I had no doubt of his ability to clear himself.”

“Still you might have assisted him.”

“By saying that I knew him? I did not think of doing that, but it occurred to me that I might annoy your friend, instead of befriending him. In such a case, I make it a rule never to act without due reflection. I fancied, without exactly knowing why, that a lady was mixed up in the affair, and that Monsieur de Saint-Briac would prefer to get out of the scrape without any assistance from me. I need not add, however, that I intended to interfere afterward, if the arrest was attended by any serious consequences, but I now congratulate myself upon having abstained from doing so. It can not be long before you discover the perpetrator of the atrocious crime, and when you have done so, there will be no possible doubt as to the unfortunate mistake that has been committed.”

“There can be no possible doubt of that, even though we should not succeed in laying hands upon the real culprit; but when the authorities make a mistake in such matters, they prefer that the public should know nothing about it, and I, who had the honor to represent them in this matter, should be greatly obliged to you if you would say nothing about the error of which Monsieur de Saint-Briac was the victim.”

“I shall be as silent as the grave. But may I venture to inquire if you have discovered any clew that may lead to the detection of the assassin?”

“None whatever, as yet. It is the supposition that he escaped by the church roof. He had plenty of time for that, for the police blundered unpardonably from the very beginning.”

“The victim will probably be identified at the morgue, to which they have taken her, I hear.”

“I hope so, but I am by no means confident of it. No papers of any sort were found upon her person, and the jewelry she wore was not made in France. If the poor

woman is a foreigner, recently arrived in Paris, as everything seems to indicate, there is a strong possibility that no one will come forward to claim the body."

"I shall doubtless surprise you very much when I tell you that I went to the morgue to-day to see the body: and, now you speak of it, I recollect that there are certain peculiarities in her attire which would seem to indicate that the lady is not a French woman. I have an extensive acquaintance with all the foreigners of distinction now in Paris, and I will inquire if there have been any new arrivals among them. Will you permit me, sir, to report to you any information that I may collect?"

"I not only authorize, but urgently request you to do so," replied M. de Malverne. "As long as I have this case on my hands, you will find me in my office at the palace every day, between the hours of twelve and four."

"I will not forget the fact, and if I should succeed in obtaining any important information between now and morning, I shall even venture to present myself at your house."

"Faubourg Saint-Honore, No. 59."

"I know; your residence has been pointed out to me, and I hope to soon become a neighbor, for I am now negotiating for the purchase of a house on the Rue de l'Elysees. I am staying temporarily at the Continental, and if you should honor me with any communication, address it to me there."

"Very well, sir," replied the judge. "But the card-players must be anathematizing me roundly, and I will no longer impose upon your good nature. The gentlemen are becoming impatient."

"That is because I owe them their revenge," said the marquis, smiling. "I have had a most remarkable run of luck for a month past, but fortune will soon weary of favoring me. When that day comes I shall be delighted, gentlemen, to see you among my conquerors. I have a presentiment that such will be my fate this evening, so if you feel tempted to try your luck—"

"We will rejoin you presently in the greenroom," interrupted Hugh.

M. de Pancorbo understood him, and, with a respectful bow, started off to join the party already assembled around the card-table.

“Certainly misfortunes never come singly,” said the captain, gloomily, as soon as he was once more alone with his friend. “It was not enough to be arrested, but this Spaniard must needs be on hand just in time to see me pass in the custody of the police.”

“I wonder what he was doing in that unfrequented part of the town?” said M. de Malverne, thoughtfully.

“He pretends that he had just paid a visit to Notre Dame.”

“I don’t believe a word of it. A man who spends his nights in playing baccarat does not spend his days in admiring the public buildings of Paris. This foreigner seems to me a very suspicious character, and I am more than ever inclined to have him watched.”

“You surely do not go so far as to imagine that he is the murderer?” queried Saint-Briac.

“It would not particularly surprise me.”

“But remember that there was nothing to oblige him to say that he was there at the time of my arrest.”

“If he told you so, it was only to give you to understand that he could proclaim the unfortunate affair everywhere if he chose, and that he had a way of getting even with you if you should attempt to meddle with his affairs. The same threat is addressed indirectly to me, who am your friend and also the judge of instruction. But I must go home now. I am anxious to know how my wife feels.”

“I hope you will say nothing to her about Monsieur de Pancorbo.”

“I shall take good care not to do that. I feel too sorry that I have given her a headache by telling her of your mishaps. Good-night.”

“But I am going with you.”

“No, no, don’t think of such a thing. Remain here, I beg, and keep an eye on our hidalgo. If he enters into conversation with you again, try to make him talk about the people he knows in Paris.”

The captain allowed his friend to depart without further opposition. He, himself, felt gloomy and perplexed. M. de Pancorbo had said nothing of any very great importance to him, but he could not drive away a suspicion that he was at this dangerous foreigner’s mercy. Still, he could not declare war upon him, for reasons that he could not divulge to Hugh. All desire to play had been dispelled by

his conversation with M. de Pancorbo, and there was nothing left for him but to drive away his sadness and uneasiness by a walk in the Champs Elysees.

So he started to leave the club-house, but as he did so, he was not a little surprised to see, talking with one of the servants, the shabbily dressed man he had seen talking with the marquis in the Champs Elysees, about half an hour before. This man had just given a letter to the liveried footman, and the captain felt sure that the missive must be intended for M. de Pancorbo.

What were the relations that existed between these two men? Saint-Briac asked himself this question, without being able to answer it, and passed on without attracting the suspicious messenger's attention.

Once outside, the idea occurred to him that he might wait and see if the noble Spaniard would join his strange correspondent, and he accordingly stationed himself at the base of one of the statues that surround the Place de la Concorde, and about fifty yards from the entrance to the club-house. He had not been there ten minutes before he saw Pancorbo and his friend in the distance, walking side by side toward a long line of carriages that edged the pavement between the Avenue Gabriel, and the broad avenue leading to the Arc de Triomphe.

The news brought by the shabbily attired messenger must have been of an important nature, for the marquis would not have been likely to leave a game in which he was winning heavily, for any mere trifle. Nor was it natural that he should take a hackney coach when his own coupé was standing close by.

The captain instantly resolved to follow him, and seeing him pause beside a carriage at the further end of the line, he hastened to the last vehicle in the row, woke the sleeping coachman, and said:

"Do you see those gentlemen up there? I want you to follow the carriage they enter. I'll give you twenty francs if you'll keep in sight of them."

The shabbily clad man opened the door of the carriage, and M. de Pancorbo entered it, followed by his companion.

The captain waited until they drove off, then sprung into his own carriage, crying:

"Now, driver!"

The carriage that was carrying the hidalgo turned to the

right, and began to ascend the avenue of the Champs Elysees. It did not go very rapidly, and Saint-Briac's coachman had no difficulty in following it at a little distance.

Suddenly the vehicle which he was pursuing left the avenue, turned into the Rue Marbeuf, and suddenly stopped. The captain hastily lowered one of the windows in the front of the carriage, and told his coachman to go no further. He was anxious to avoid a meeting with M. de Pancorbo, but he wanted to see what was about to happen—to see without being seen, and his coachman had the presence of mind to stop his horse about twenty yards from the other carriage, which had paused almost directly under a street lamp.

From this point the Rue de Marbeuf made a rapid descent into a sort of hollow which has since been filled up, but which was then almost uninhabited. That night, it looked very like a dark and bottomless pit, though it was only about fifty yards from the main avenue of the Champs Elysees, which was ablaze with lights.

What could the noble marquis be in search of here? The captain was just asking himself this question, when he saw the shabbily dressed man who had come to the club in search of M. de Pancorbo, alight from the first vehicle. Saint-Briac waited to see the mysterious hidalgo make his appearance, likewise; but, to his great astonishment, the man closed the door, paid the coachman, and walked rapidly down the street. What had become of the Spaniard? The captain thought that he must have remained in the vehicle, and that he would now give orders to be driven to the Continental Hotel. But he soon abandoned this idea, for the driver turned his horse's head, and as he passed his fellow-coachman explained the whole situation to the wondering captain by saying:

“I have just dropped a droll customer. He picked me up on the Place de la Concorde; but though two passengers entered my carriage, only one of them stayed in it. The other only passed through it, went in at one door, and out at the other. It is the old story of fooling the detectives who are watching them. It is all the same to me, though, as the one I brought here paid a hundred sous for his ride.”

“And you had the satisfaction of fooling the police be-

sides, and that is worth more," replied the other coachman.

A glance at the interior of the passing vehicle satisfied the captain that it was empty. His expedition had proved a failure, for he had no idea of starting down the gloomy Rue Marbeuf in pursuit of the Spaniard's subordinate. The man was too far in advance for Saint-Briac to have any hope of overtaking him; but one fact was established to the latter's entire satisfaction, viz., that M. de Pancorbo led a very mysterious existence, and that he did not desire any one to meddle with his affairs.

In fact, Saint-Briac was beginning to realize that he had just been guilty of an act of folly, and that it would be advisable for him to leave this dangerous individual undisturbed. Besides, he felt a need of rest after the excitement of this eventful evening, and so decided to return home.

The Avenue d'Antin is not far from the Rue de Marbeuf, and the idea of a walk in the crisp air was pleasant; so he dismissed his coachman after paying him liberally, and walked down the Champs Elysees as far as the Rond Point, where he paused an instant to satisfy himself that no one was following him. Since his mishaps of the evening before, he had become suspicious of everybody.

Reaching home in that frame of mind in which the merest trifle alarms one, he frowned slightly on perceiving a letter which his valet had placed in a conspicuous place on the table in the smoking-room.

This letter had the stamp of the club upon it, but the handwriting was unknown to him. He tore it open nervously, and a single glance showed him that it bore no signature. It contained only about thirty lines; but its very brevity was portentous.

"SIR," wrote his anonymous correspondent, "I supposed that you had understood me, and that we could trust each other. Your secret is in my possession, and I was more than willing to be silent, provided you would not seek to discover mine. You have chosen to play the spy on me. I caught you at it, on the Place de la Concorde just now, and for this once, I contented myself with mystifying you. But as you will be sure to repeat the attempt, I feel it my duty to warn you that if you try anything of the kind again, I will make you repent of your meddling with matters that do not concern you. My vengeance is ready, and a cruel vengeance it is.

"You think, perhaps, that I will confine myself to spreading the story of your arrest everywhere. You are very much mistaken. I

shall do much worse than that. I know the lady who was with you yesterday, the lady you refused to name to your friend, the investigating magistrate. Ah, well, I will tell him her name, and when he hears it, you will see how he will punish you and your accomplice. You are now warned. Govern yourself accordingly."

That was all. The letter fell from the nerveless hands of Saint-Briac, who could only falter:

"Odette at the mercy of this wretch! I will kill him! I *must* kill him!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE large clock in the Hôtel-Dieu has just struck ten. Alfred Daubrac has completed his round of morning visits, and is preparing to go out. He had received a message from Meriadec the evening before, requesting him to call and see him at the first opportunity, and he was about to obey the summons.

He paused on the portico of the hospital to light his cigar, for he indulged in pipes only in the privacy of his own chamber, and before stepping down upon the pavement, he glanced up at the old cathedral which has reared its magnetic form high above the surrounding buildings for centuries. Suddenly his attention was attracted by a sound which was familiar to him from having been often heard by the bedside of the sick and dying. Some one was sobbing behind him. He turned, and saw a young girl just leaving the hospital, with her face buried in her handkerchief. He recognized her, however, by her golden hair, and said to her hastily:

"You here, mademoiselle! What has happened?"

"My father, my poor father!" murmured Rose Verdiere, weeping bitterly.

"What! has he, too, fallen from the tower?" asked Daubrac, who had a very bad habit of jesting upon any and all occasions.

"He had a stroke last night," replied the girl, with a reproachful look.

"A stroke of paralysis? The deuce! That is a serious matter. And he has been brought to the hospital, I suppose. What ward is he in?"

"St. Andrew's ward."

“Good! the physician there is a particular friend of mine. I will recommend your father to him; and if there is such a thing as saving him, he will be saved.”

“They just told me that there was no hope for him,” sobbed Rose.

“One must never despair,” said Daubrac kindly, touched by the sight of this sincere sorrow. “We will do our very best to cure him. But you, mademoiselle, what are you going to do? Are you going to remain alone in your quarters in the tower?”

“They turned me out this morning.”

“Turned you out?”

“Alas, yes! My father was dismissed yesterday on account of that unfortunate affair. I can not take his place, and the position can not be left vacant. The new keeper entered upon his duties this morning. There is nothing left for me to do but to seek a refuge elsewhere; but I know not where to go.”

“I have one to offer you. Oh, do not mistake my meaning. Have you any confidence in me? You know me but slightly, yet I hope that you believe me incapable of deceiving you.”

“Yes,” said the girl gravely.

“Ah, well, I have a plan; and if you will agree to it, I am sure that everything can be satisfactorily arranged. You recollect the gentleman who went up into the tower with me the other day—not the one in the red cap—the one in the broad-brimmed hat.”

“Yes; he returned alone, about an hour after your departure, and had a talk with me.”

“Oh, ho!” muttered Daubrac. “I had no idea that he would repeat his visit in order to get another look at you; but I am not surprised.”

“He did not come back to the tower to see me; he went up as far as the gallery, and found a child that he took away with him.”

“A child! That is news, indeed. It is probably to tell me about this newly found treasure that he is so anxious to see me. But to return to your affairs, mademoiselle. What do you think of my friend?”

“I could not think otherwise than well of him; he has such a frank and honest face, and he showed a very kind

interest in me during the short conversation we had together."

"Then you don't dislike him?"

"No, certainly not."

"Did he tell you his name?"

"I did not ask it."

"He is the Baron de Meriadec. He has a small fortune, and no other occupation than to do good to those around him. He was created and placed in this world to defend the weak and protect the innocent. I should add, perhaps, that he has reached an age when he can constitute himself the guardian of a young girl without compromising her in the least."

"I do not gainsay all this; but what are you aiming at?"

"To ask you if you would object to placing yourself under his protection. I assure you, upon my honor, that you will never repent of having accepted the hospitality he will deem it a pleasure to offer you."

"You surely do not make this proposal seriously?"

"So seriously that I am ready to take you there at once. He lives on the Rue Cassette in a little house that seems to have been built expressly to accommodate two separate families. He lives there alone, attended by a worthy woman, who would go through fire and water for him. Why should you not take possession of the pavilion. It is entirely detached from the other part of the house. It is very plainly furnished, and would be just the place for a maker of artificial flowers to carry on her trade. You could live there upon the proceeds of your labor as honorably as in your casemate in the north tower."

"But, sir, your friend scarcely knows me. Why should he take an interest in me?"

"I repeat that he takes a deep interest in all who are in trouble, mademoiselle," replied Daubrac. "He knows you, however, much better than you suppose; for I have often spoken to him about you, and you can not suppose that I have ever spoken ill of you."

"Still, that does not justify you in disposing of him and his house without consulting him."

"We will consult him, then. The Rue Cassette is not at the uttermost ends of the earth. We shall be there in a quarter of an hour if we take a carriage."

"I do not dare," murmured Rose.

“It is certainly much easier and less embarrassing than to go about among strangers seeking a shelter; and this is what you will be compelled to do if you decline my proposal, for you can not stay in the street.”

Rose hung her head, and said not a word; but it was evident that she felt the force of this argument. At last she raised her head, looked the young surgeon full in the face, and said firmly:

“Will you swear to me, upon your honor, that you have no evil motive in giving me this advice?”

“How suspicious you are!” cried Daubrac, gayly. “I would certainly be the worst of scoundrels to set such a trap for you. You are not a stranger to me. For more than six months I have seen you passing every day, and have heard all about you. I know that no life could be purer and nobler than yours. An opportunity offers to do you a service, do not be surprised that I embrace it. When you have seen Meriadec, you will thank me for having taken you to him. But if we waste any more time talking here, we shall miss our friend of the Rue Cassette. Come, we shall find a carriage on the Quai Saint Michel.”

Five minutes later Rose and the young surgeon were bowling swiftly along toward the home of the baron, who little expected a visit from the Angel of the Bells. The young girl was grave and thoughtful, but Albert enlivened the drive by his animated conversation. He questioned her so adroitly that he soon learned all the particulars of her life with her father, ascertained all about the establishments for which she worked, and the wages she could earn at her trade. He also learned that she had lost her mother about ten years before, and that she would be left entirely alone in the world if her father did not recover from his illness; and when he had learned all about this past, which was as clear as crystal, and this gloomy future, he grew still more enthusiastic over his plan of placing Rose under Meriadec's protection.

“Tell me something about the child my friend found upon the church roof,” Daubrac said, suddenly. “What the deuce was he going to do with the boy?”

“Monsieur Meriadec had not time to tell me; he seemed in a great hurry to get the boy away,” replied Rose. “Besides, I should not have dared to question him on the subject. The idea, however, did occur to me that the little

fellow had perhaps gone up into the tower with the unfortunate woman who fell from the top of it. I was not at home when she went up, and so I did not see her pass."

"I am satisfied that your supposition is correct; and I should not be afraid to bet almost any amount that we shall find the poor little fellow at the Rue Cassette. Meriadec's pet dream is to convert his home into an orphan asylum. All this happens very fortunately, for you are so kind-hearted that you must be very fond of children, and this little fellow will be company for you; and if he is connected with the tragedy, as I suspect he is—"

Daubrac did not have time to finish his sentence, for the carriage had paused in front of a modest gate-way.

"Here we are, mademoiselle," remarked the surgeon. "The home of the last of the barons of Meriadec is not very imposing, but you must not judge entirely by outward appearances."

The gate was not locked, so Daubrac had only to turn the knob to gain an entrance into a square courtyard, surrounded on three sides by a rambling one-story house. The structure was much dilapidated, and must have been built a long time, for its walls were covered with moss, and tufts of grass had sprung up between the stones in the paved court-yard.

"Here is the pavilion you will probably occupy, mademoiselle," said Daubrac, pointing to the left wing of this humble abode. "Meriadec occupies the apartments opposite."

"Really, you dispose of his house as if it belonged to you," remarked the girl.

"It might as well belong to me, as you will see."

And he called Meriadec's name in a voice that rung out like a clarion.

A window was opened almost instantly, and the baron appeared, clad in a bournous which he had brought back with him from Algiers; and as he had drawn the hood of this singular garment over his head, Rose did not know him at first, but he recognized her at the very first glance; and, uttering an exclamation of mingled joy and surprise, he hastily left the window and rushed down-stairs.

"What shall I say to him?" murmured the girl.

"Nothing," replied the surgeon, laughing, "I will speak for you."

Daubrac kept his promise faithfully, and pleaded his protégée's cause well. He explained the situation briefly and clearly, and Meriadec listened in a positive flutter of delight.

Rose, reassured by the baron's greeting, began to make excuses for thus coming to ask his hospitality; but Meriadec did not give her time to finish, but interrupted her to thank her for the pleasure she would confer upon him by consenting to become his tenant.

The young surgeon suggested that they should take Rose to see the part of the house she was to occupy, and inquired if the left wing was ready for the young girl's reception.

"All ready," replied the kind-hearted baron. "I have a child there now; but you know the wing contains three rooms—two of them bedrooms."

"A child!" exclaimed the surgeon. "Well, I am not surprised. I always suspected you of an intention to found an orphan asylum."

"I will explain how and why I picked it up. You and mademoiselle will both approve, I am sure."

"You need not explain. I know where the boy came from."

"Yes; I told Monsieur Daubrac that you found him in the gallery that unites the tower of Notre Dame," said Rose.

"But you can not keep him indefinitely."

"I shall at least keep him until I have discovered the unfortunate woman's murderer."

"The gentleman we had arrested is certainly not the murderer."

"No. I am perfectly satisfied of that; and I know the real culprit. I saw him at the morgue, which he had the audacity to visit, in order to get a look at his dead wife."

"His wife!"

"Yes; the wretch is the husband of the murdered woman, and the father of the child I brought home with me."

"How do you know?"

"The boy recognized him at the morgue, and told me his whole history. He and his parents are Russians. He came to Paris with his mother, where his father met them, firmly resolved, apparently, to get rid of them both."

"And he succeeded. Well, the authorities will have no

difficulty in finding him now. You have notified them, I suppose?"

"No. I was unable to furnish them with any definite information in regard to him. The lad is ignorant of his family name. He only knows that his father is called Paul Constantinowitch; his mother, Xenia Iwanowna, and he himself Sacha; but that is all he knows."

"That is very strange. Don't you think it would be fine sport for us to set to work and ferret out the perpetrator of the deed?"

"Yes, and if you had not come here this morning, I should have called on you to propose that you assist me in the undertaking. I have already secured one auxiliary, the artist who witnessed the crime."

"A hare-brained fellow, is he not?"

"Not so much so as you suppose. You can judge for yourself, however, if you like. He is here now, and we were talking the matter over when you called me. But we forget that Mademoiselle Verdier is standing here in the sun, and that it is time to show her the apartments she consents to occupy."

"If I felt any hesitation about accepting the hospitality you so kindly offer, the presence of this child would decide me," said Rose quickly. "I will care for him as though he were my own."

"Come, mademoiselle," said Daubrac. "You will see that our friend Meriadec is very comfortably fixed, after all. He has excellent taste, and has collected a host of curiosities during his travels."

They found Fabreguette standing by the fire-place, emptying the ashes from his pipe upon the marble mantel. When the young girl entered, he condescended to remove the famous red cap which left his head only upon great occasions.

Meriadec pushed forward an arm-chair, which Rose accepted, and Daubrac seated himself astride a wooden stool chair that the baron must have brought from the wilds of Brittany.

"Well, what conclusion have you arrived at?" inquired the surgeon. "I understand that you have been deliberating upon the best means of capturing the assassin you saw at the morgue. If I can be of any service you can count upon me."

"I did count upon you," said Fabreguette, leaning an elbow upon the table near which he had just seated himself. "Will mademoiselle also consent to aid us?"

"I will take care of the child while you search for the assassin."

"Perfect!" exclaimed the painter. "Our band is complete now. A charming lady and three brave knights against one cowardly scoundrel. The only thing necessary now, is to come to a thorough understanding with the handsome gentleman who was arrested by mistake. But hard! some one is coming up the steps now," said Fabreguette suddenly. "What if it should be he?"

The sound of measured footsteps soon became distinctly audible, and this was followed by a timid rap at the door. Meriadec rose hastily, and opening it, found himself face to face with a man he instantly recognized. Fabreguette had guessed correctly. This man was the prisoner whom the judge of instruction had released, and whom the baron had met upon the boulevard in front of the Palais de Justice.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, courteously. "I called to ask you to give me a few moments of your time, but I see that you are not alone."

"Come in, sir," replied Meriadec, eagerly. "My guests are persons whom you know, and who will be all the more glad to see you from the fact that we were just speaking of you."

"But you were not expecting to see me, I judge. I was ignorant of your name and address until it was given me by my friend, Monsieur de Malverne, the magistrate who summoned you as a witness, but who was unable to give you a hearing. I know that I am speaking to an honorable man, and I do not hesitate to introduce myself. I was formerly an officer of cavalry, and my name is Jacques de Saint-Briac. Need I add that I have come to confer with you in regard to the unfortunate affair in which, by the merest chance, you are mixed up."

"And in which we were guilty of such a deplorable mistake. We all know what to think now—I, my friend Daubrac, surgeon at the Hôtel-Dieu, Monsieur Fabreguette and Mademoiselle Rose Verdier."

The captain bowed low in acknowledgment of this general introduction, and said:

"I congratulate myself upon my good fortune in finding

your friends here; and with your permission, I will explain the object of my visit to them, as well."

But before the captain could do so, Daubrac hastily interposed, and said:

"It is not very difficult to divine that you have called to ask our friend Meriadec if he could not give you some information concerning the perpetrator of the crime committed on the tower of Notre Dame. Well, the baron has seen him."

"And I, too, have seen him," cried Fabreguette.

"And we met here to-day for consultation," added Daubrac, "having solemnly pledged ourselves to find the murderer and deliver him up to the judge who admitted your innocence."

"I would rather have my revenge in a different way," replied Saint-Briac.

"Yes, I understand. You would prefer to avoid the scandal of a criminal suit in which you would perhaps be compelled to figure, and which might compromise a lady; but you can have no intention of shooting the rascal at sight, and you would do him too much honor by challenging him; so I don't see but what you will be obliged to let the law take its course. Still, we are not called upon to decide that point now, as we have not yet captured the scoundrel. Meriadec and Fabreguette both saw him, but he managed to escape them. Meriadec will tell you about it."

The baron did so, beginning with his second visit to the tower of Notre Dame. He told how he found Sacha, what he had done, and what had occurred at the morgue, to all of which Saint-Briac listened with a very natural interest, but without manifesting the satisfaction he should have experienced.

"We were unable to overtake him, unfortunately," said Meriadec, in conclusion, "and I caught only a glimpse of his face, but I feel sure I should recognize him."

"What sort of a looking person is he?" inquired the captain.

"He is tall, with rather broad shoulders, but elegantly formed. He has regular features, a dark complexion, very black eyes and hair, and he wears a mustache—no beard."

This description corresponded in every particular with

that of M. de Pancorbo, and Saint-Briac, struck by this coincidence, asked how old the gentleman appeared to be.

"I should say that he was about your age, and he looks not unlike you. Seen from a distance, you might easily be mistaken for him. If you would like to see for yourself, I will show you a sketch I made about a quarter of an hour after our meeting. It was very hastily done, but it may give you some idea of the person."

The artist drew from his pocket a sketch book that never left him—for he worked oftener in the street than in his attic—found the page, and placed it before the eyes of Saint-Briac, who exclaimed:

"It is he—"

"It is he?" repeated Fabreguette. "Then you, too, have seen him?"

"No," stammered Saint-Briac. "I mean that the portrait strongly resembles—"

"Some one you suspect of being the assassin," concluded Daubrac.

"Something like that. But mere suspicions are not enough, and I have no proofs."

"No matter!" exclaimed Meriadec. "Will you have the goodness to tell me upon what you base your suspicions. It will be a starting point, and the information you can give us will perhaps put us on the scoundrel's track."

Saint-Briac being thus cornered, was obliged to explain. He felt sure that he was dealing with reliable men, and that it would be better to explain the situation to them clearly, without disclosing the great secret, however; that is to say, without mentioning Mme. de Malverne.

"Gentlemen," he began, "you know that at the time the crime was committed, I was in the gallery of the church with a lady whose name I was unwilling to give, for reasons you, of course, understand."

"Yes, and each of us would have done the same under the same circumstances."

"Well, last evening, at the club to which I belong, I was accosted by a comparative stranger, who told me that he had seen me crossing the square, in the custody of two policemen, the day before. This announcement seemed very strange to me, though it was accompanied by protestations of secrecy; and while wondering how the gentleman

happened to be there just at that moment, it occurred to me that he was perhaps descending from the south tower."

"Is the gentleman a Russian?"

"No, he is a Spaniard, or pretends to be, but he strongly resembles the sketch you just showed me."

"This simplifies matters," cried Daubrac. "We shall only have to bring the child Meriadec found into this person's presence. He would recognize the man at once. Where does the scoundrel live?"

"At the Continental Hotel, but—"

"Sacha certainly did not go to that hotel on his arrival in the city. He talks of a large private house where there were no other people."

"Perhaps this man has some other home. But now will you permit me to explain why I do not wish to appear in the matter? On leaving the club, I saw this Marquis de Pancorbo—for that is the title he bears—enter a hackney coach in company with a very shabbily dressed man, and I followed their carriage until it stopped at the corner of the Rue Marbeuf. But the Spaniard was not in the vehicle. He had seen me watching him upon the Place de la Concorde, and he had only passed through the carriage in which his companion remained. On returning home, I found a letter from him which he had written at the club, after pretending to enter the carriage. In this letter, he gives me his ultimatum. He declares that he also saw the lady who was with me—that he knows her, and that if I continue to watch his movements, he will denounce me to her husband."

"He is a venomous scoundrel, upon my word!" exclaimed the surgeon. "We certainly must bring him to justice."

"But take notice, gentlemen, that he does not confess the crime."

"He will have to confess it, if the boy recognizes him."

"Perhaps so, but in that case, he will carry out his threats, and the woman I love will be irretrievably ruined."

"But why, if you do not appear in the matter. He can not know that you are in league with Meriadec."

Saint-Briac shook his head dubiously, and said, with an emotion he did not attempt to conceal:

"Gentlemen, I leave it to you, and to mademoiselle, here—who has been so kind as to listen to my story—ought

I, for the sake of punishing an assassin, deliver this lady up to this scoundrel's revenge?"

"No," replied Rose, firmly.

"It is the heart, not the reason, that prompts this reply," interposed the surgeon, quickly. "What! here is a scoundrel who kills his wife and deserts his child! We know it. It is in our power to prove it, and we say nothing! That would be unworthy of us—in a word, arrant cowardice."

And seeing Saint-Briac turn pale, Daubrac hastily added:

"You, yourself, sir, must see that I am right. Besides, as I just told you, you need take no part in our chase after this pretended Spaniard. He knows that it was not you who cared for the child he abandoned, as you were arrested immediately after the crime, and it is the child who will do the work after all. You need not appear in the matter."

"You are sure, gentlemen, perfectly sure, that Sacha will aid you in securing his father's conviction?"

"It will be enough if he identifies him as the man who met him on his arrival in Paris, and who went up into the tower with him. We will do the rest."

"Does he know that his mother has been murdered?"

"No," replied Meriadec. "I haven't had the heart to tell him."

"So much the better," exclaimed Daubrac. "He will not hesitate to identify the scoundrel when we bring him into his presence."

Just then a door at the lower end of the room suddenly opened, and Sacha rushed in. He was very pale, and his face plainly showed that he had heard all. Running straight up to Meriadec, he cried:

"Is it true that he killed her?"

"I wished to conceal the fact from you, my boy," murmured the baron, deeply moved, "but as you know it—"

"I know that you suspect him. Now prove to me that it was he."

Meriadec made no reply. He could not summon up courage to explain to the poor little fellow why the murderer could be none other than the man they had met at the morgue; but the surgeon, who was less timorous than his friend, undertook the task.

"My boy," he said, kindly, "your mother was thrown from the top of the tower which she ascended with your

father, who disappeared after the catastrophe that made you an orphan. He fled, without troubling himself about you, whom he had left at the foot of this same tower. Do you not think, with us, that he alone could have committed this atrocious crime? And that being the case, I am sure you will not refuse to aid us in avenging your mother."

"How?" inquired the child, with a coolness which astonished his listeners.

"By delivering her murderer up to justice."

"But how can that be done?"

"By accompanying one of us to his residence, and, when you are brought face to face with him, to call him by name, and ask him what has become of the Countess Xenia," replied Meriadec.

"He will run away exactly as he did yesterday when I met him in the morgue."

"But we will overtake him this time," replied Fabreguette. "He will not always have a carriage and a fleet horse at his disposal."

"Very well. I am ready. Where shall we find him?"

"If I knew I would take you there at once," said Meriadec. "We have an idea that he is living at one of the large hotels under an assumed name, but we must satisfy ourselves that we are right before proceeding any further."

"I feel strongly inclined to go and examine the houses on the Rue de Marbeuf," added Daubrac, who had listened very attentively to the captain's history of his adventures. "Sacha might perhaps recognize the one to which he was taken on his arrival in the city."

"Yes, if I could see the inside of it, I should recognize the chamber where I slept, and the servant who waited upon me; but I do not remember the outside of the house at all. I only recollect that we entered it by a large gateway, and that it was necessary to descend a badly paved street to reach it. I fell asleep on the way, and the jolting woke me."

"Then it was probably on the Rue de Marbeuf that you spent the night. You breakfasted there, too, I suppose?"

"Yes, with mamma. Paul Constantinowitch went out early in the morning. We only had some tea and eggs."

"Served by a servant?"

"Yes, by a man who wore a very ugly livery, and who

did not understand his business. He broke two plates while we were at breakfast, and mamma scolded him."

"In Russian?"

"No, he was a Frenchman."

"Tell me, my dear Sacha," continued Daubrac, "when you went out, after breakfast, to visit Notre Dame, did you pass down a broad avenue shaded on both sides by tall trees?"

"Yes, and afterward, we crossed a square where there was a fountain, and statues. Then we came to a quay, and the river was on our right."

"I am sure now," said Fabreguette. "The little chap came from the Rue de Marbeuf, and I will pledge myself to discover the house where he spent the night."

Sacha cast a side glance at the artist, whose familiarity annoyed him, then turned suddenly to Meriadec, who had not taken a very prominent part in the conversation thus far.

"You have not introduced me to that lady and gentleman," he remarked, pointing to Rose and Saint-Briac.

"You must have seen this young lady on the tower stairway," replied the baron, surprised to hear his young protégé speak so much like a man of the world.

"True. I recollect now."

"And now you will see her every day. She is going to live here, in the rooms next to yours."

"So much the better!" cried the child. "I shall not be bothered with that wrinkled old woman. May I kiss you, mademoiselle?"

Rose, deeply touched, as well as charmed, took him in her arms and kissed him on the forehead, saying gently:

"I will do my best to fill your mother's place."

"My mother! You don't look a bit like her. She had a stern face; and your eyes are so kind and gentle! I am sure you will not scold me all the time as she did. And you will love me, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, I shall love you with all my heart," replied the girl, warmly. "Why shouldn't I? I, too, am alone in the world. I have no mother, and my poor father is dying."

"But you are not without friends," said Meriadec consolingly.

"Besides, your father may recover," added the surgeon.

“But to return to the subject. Master Sacha consents to aid us. That is one great advantage; but we must decide how we are to proceed.”

“First of all, we must find the house on the Rue de Marbeuf,” replied Fabreguette, clinging tenaciously to his plan. “I might go there this very day with the little fellow.”

“I wouldn’t go with you,” replied Sacha, stoutly.

“Why not, young man?”

“He is quite right to refuse; for he would incur great danger by accompanying you,” interposed Daubrac. “The man knows you by sight, as you ran after him on leaving the morgue.”

“He knows me, too,” said Meriadec.

“It would seem that I am the only person here who could safely fulfill the mission,” said Rose, timidly.

“You, mademoiselle!” exclaimed Meriadec. “You forget that there is danger attending it. That man is capable of anything; and if he should discover that you are in pursuit of him—”

“He would not suspect a woman; while Monsieur Daubrac would imperil his life.”

“My life is at your service, mademoiselle,” said the surgeon, gayly; “but you need have no fears. I am big enough to defend myself; and no accident will befall me. Our young friend will not accept Fabreguette’s company, but I am sure he will consent to go with me.”

“Yes, if she will come with us,” replied Sacha, clinging even more closely to Rose.

“Pardon me, gentlemen,” interrupted Saint-Briac, “but it seems to me that you do not exactly understand the situation; and you must permit me to remind you that the first thing to be done is to satisfy ourselves that the Spaniard of whom I have spoken and the man you are seeking are one and the same person. Hence it is necessary that the child should see this Spaniard, and the Rue de Marbeuf is not the place for that.”

“Very true,” said Meriadec, approvingly. “He does not reside there, and the house in which Sacha slept was doubtless rented for only one night.”

“Monsieur de Pancorbo is staying at the Continental Hotel. He goes to the club every afternoon about five o’clock, and leaves it just before midnight. Nothing could

be easier than to wait for him at the door, and see him as he passes out; but we must take great care to prevent his father from catching a glimpse of him."

"It would be a good way to place the little chap in a carriage in front of the club-house, but on the other side of the street," said Fabreguette. "Mademoiselle Rose might go with him, as he does not seem inclined to move a step without her. Then, if Sacha recognizes him, we will go in a body to the judge of instruction and make our joint accusation. Paul Constantinowitch will be immediately arrested; and as the scoundrel will have no one but ourselves to deal with, he will not think of revenging himself upon Monsieur de Saint-Briac and his lady friend."

The captain shook his head. He was less sanguine than Fabreguette, but he had gone too far to draw back.

"I have only one request to make, gentlemen," he said to them, "that is, not to denounce him until you have seen me again. If you deliver him up to justice, there are certain precautions that I shall have to take."

"Then there is nothing to prevent us from trying the experiment to-night," exclaimed Fabreguette.

"I have no objections," replied Saint-Briac, "but I think it would be well for mademoiselle to bring Sacha back to the house immediately; and I would prefer that none of you should call on me. It will be much better for Monsieur Meriadec to communicate with me in writing. And now, gentlemen, there is nothing left for me to do but to take leave of you. I know I can count upon your fidelity; and I beg you to rest assured of my sincere gratitude."

Three hands were extended to press his, and the grasp was cordiality itself in every instance. Meriadec escorted him as far as the court-yard; and the captain went away well pleased to have found brave hearts that throbbed in unison with his, and allies upon whose devotion he could depend. But all this did not prevent him from being haunted by a vague uneasiness in regard to the possible consequences of the disclosures he had just made; and this anxiety engrossed him to such a degree, that he failed to notice a man who was sitting upon the opposite curb-stone, and who seemed to be intently watching the door of the baron's house.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER the captain's departure, the council of war was broken up, as if by common consent. The friends had but little more to say to one another, as they had already adopted the plan of campaign proposed by their new ally. It was decided that Rose Verdier and Sacha should go to the club-house a little before five o'clock to watch for the arrival of M. de Pancorbo, or rather, Paul Constantinowitch; and the necessary arrangements having been made, Daubrac departed in company with Fabreguette.

The former was still a little in doubt as to the character of this singular artist, whom he knew so slightly; and he was inclined to think that Meriadec had been a little rash in admitting him into his confidence; but it was too late to prevent that now, so Daubrac mentally resolved to study their new acquaintance and ascertain what kind of a person he really was.

"I am going to get some breakfast now," he remarked.

"And you?"

"I wish I could do the same," replied the eccentric artist.

"What prevents you?"

"Empty pockets," replied Fabreguette.

"You don't find painting very profitable, then?"

"I have several orders, but—"

"But what?"

"I have no money to purchase colors."

"Oh, well, you needn't worry about your breakfast to-day," replied the surgeon, smiling in a friendly fashion.

"You invite me, then?" cried Fabreguette.

"We are partners now, you know. The very least I can do is to save you from starvation; and I can assure you that you will always find a cordial welcome awaiting you at Meriadec's table. He did not invite us to stay this morning, because he had two guests already, and he had ordered breakfast only for three; but fortunately I am on hand, and we can proceed to enjoy ourselves."

"You refuse yourself nothing, evidently. I—when I am in luck—eat at a restaurant where I can get soup and

a chop for eight sous; but as you seem to have more money than you know what to do with, I will accept your invitation with pleasure."

"To say that I have more money than I know what to do with is not stating the case exactly. I am not rolling in gold. My mother gives me an allowance of one hundred and fifty francs a month, and, when I am on duty, the hospital board furnishes me with plain but nourishing food; but I can afford to give myself a treat occasionally; and I know a place on the Boulevard Saint-Michel where we can get a very good breakfast without being ruined."

"At the corner of the Rue des Ecoles? I have never dared to enter it. It is too high-toned for me."

"Didn't I tell you that I'd foot the bill?"

"Then I will accept your invitation on condition that you will be my guest at some future day," replied the artist, assuming a dignified air that amused Daubrac prodigiously.

Fabreguette's replies amused him, and he thought all the better of his new acquaintance for not attempting to hide his poverty.

On reaching the restaurant before mentioned, they entered it without glancing behind them, and consequently without perceiving a man whom they had failed to notice in the Rue Cassette, but who had been following them closely for twenty minutes.

They seated themselves at a table at the lower end of the restaurant, which was now well nigh deserted, for it was nearly one o'clock, and the students that usually frequented the place were now crowding the tables of the neighboring beer shops. A trim little waitress came running up to take their order. Daubrac did things handsomely, there was no question about it. He ordered two bottles of wine of superior quality, and three expensive dishes: an *omelette aux rognons*, *filet des bœuf*, with new potatoes, and some French peas. A long time had elapsed since the artist had enjoyed such a banquet, and he protested loudly against the extravagance of the *menu*, but his companion reassured him.

"I have just received my last quarter's salary," he said, gayly, "and I am delighted to squander it with you."

"You are fortunate," sighed Fabreguette. "One month is exactly like another with me."

“There will be a change for the better soon, my dear fellow. I will secure you some commissions, never fear. I don’t go in fashionable society much, but I have some wealthy acquaintances.”

“Look; here comes a neighbor,” exclaimed Fabreguette, under his breath.

A man had just entered the room, and, after hesitating between several vacant tables, he chose one next to that at which the two young men were seated.

“The devil!” muttered Daubrac. “He will be very much in our way, for we want to talk over our great scheme. Suppose we change our seats?”

The new-comer was already giving his order to the waitress, but he used signs exclusively in making known his wants. He pointed to a dish upon the bill of fare she offered him, and when she asked him if he would take wine, he replied:

“I don’t understand you. Speak louder; I am deaf.”

He was a white-bearded man, bowed with age, and poorly dressed. With his vizored cap and large blue spectacles, he looked very much like a superannuated clerk who had been retired on a pension on account of his infirmities. The pert little waitress seemed to be in no haste to serve him, and evinced a strong inclination to make fun of him, as she indulged in several little grimaces behind his back.

“I asked you if you wanted some wine?” she cried, tartly.

“Some bread?” repeated the man. “Yes, two sous’ worth; and see that there is some strength in your *bouillon*. For dessert I will take three sous’ worth of cheese. Make haste, my girl, I am in a hurry.”

“I sha’n’t break my neck for you, you old owl, I can tell you that.”

This impatient response made Fabreguette laugh; but the man did not so much as wink, probably because he did not hear it.

“He’s as deaf as a post,” said the artist aloud, scrutinizing the new-comer out of the corner of his eye.

Their neighbor drew a penny paper from his pocket and began to peruse it without paying the slightest attention to the young men.

“I would like to know positively,” muttered Daubrac, whose suspicions had evidently been aroused.

Fabreguette replied with a gesture that said as plainly as any words, "We'll soon find out. I'm going to try him." Then, without raising his voice, but articulating every word distinctly, he added:

"So you think that old man is a detective?"

As he spoke he subjected the new-comer's face to the closest scrutiny, but it remained as expressionless as stone. The waitress brought him what he had ordered, and he began breaking his bread into his *bouillon* without even lifting his eyes from his paper.

"I am satisfied now," remarked the artist. "We can talk over our affairs with as much freedom as if we were in the middle of the Champ-de-Mars."

"Let us begin by discussing our omelette," said Daubrac, who still had his doubts.

"It is delicious!" exclaimed Fabreguette. "One never finds anything like this at Mother Cordapuis's; but I content myself with her cooking, because she will trust me for as many as three meals in succession. But I exhausted her patience yesterday, and if you had not invited me to breakfast with you, I should have had to go without, to-day. My gratitude makes me your devoted servant in any and all things."

"It is my friend Meriadec whom you must thank, and to whom you must yield obedience. He is the chief of our league, and I am only a subordinate. I must confess, however, that I do not very clearly understand why he does not leave the task of hunting this criminal to the judge of instruction."

"It is because he fears to get the captain into trouble, probably."

"The captain! There is another man who doesn't seem to know what he wants. If I were in his place, I would not call in help to rid me of an enemy. I would go to work myself."

"He is afraid, on his sweetheart's account."

"So he wants us to draw his chestnuts out of the fire for him. I have no objections, so far as I myself am concerned, but our plan does not seem very practicable. When the young Muscovite recognizes his mother's murderer in the person of this pretended Spaniard, we shall not be much better off. The testimony of a lad of nine years will not be sufficient to induce the authorities to issue a warrant

for the arrest of a man of wealth and position; and, even if it should, we have no evidence against him."

"And consequently, whatever Monsieur Meriadec may say, I am going to explore the Rue de Marbeuf; and I have an idea that I shall obtain some valuable information there."

"Not so loud," whispered Daubrac, eying his neighbor, though he seemed completely absorbed in gulping down his soup.

"Oh, there is no danger of his overhearing us," said Fabreguette, shrugging his shoulders. "But to return to our project, I know the locality we are speaking of perfectly. I resided there once, while in the employ of a carriage-builder, who hired me to paint armorial designs on his vehicles, and I feel satisfied that I can find the house where Sacha slept without the slightest difficulty. I would even be willing to bet you something handsome that I will enter it."

"By the way, speaking of Sacha, what do you think of the lad who has won our good Meriadec's heart so completely?"

"I think he is a very bright boy for his age."

"So do I; but I can not help doubting the sincerity of this precocious *gamin*."

"Here is a little more wine that ought not to be slighted," continued Fabreguette, emptying his glass at a draught. "It puts new life into a man; and I feel quite competent to perform alone the task we three are about to undertake. Where are you going when you leave here?"

"To the hospital. I must be there to make the next round of visits; besides, I want to see old Verdier, and ascertain if there is any hope for him. I am afraid not."

"I am going straight to the Rue de Marbeuf."

"Go ahead, my dear fellow, but be prudent. A single mistake would spoil everything."

"Don't be afraid. I'll keep my eyes open. Ah, the old man is getting up to go. His breakfast has not cost him much. Didn't I tell you that he wasn't troubling himself about us?" he continued. "If he were a spy, he would have remained to shadow us. Besides, he is as deaf as a post, and hasn't heard a word of our conversation. To your very good health, my dear fellow!"

“Here’s to yours, and good luck to you!” replied Daubrac, who did not share all his friend’s illusions, however.

The meal ended without any further incident worthy of note. Daubrac paid the bill, and Fabreguette, on leaving the restaurant, offered to accompany the young surgeon to the hospital, but the offer was declined. He was in a hurry to reach home, and he had nothing more of importance to say to the Bohemian, whom he had had plenty of time to study. He did not like the idea of leaving him absolutely penniless, however, so he offered him in the form of a loan, a five franc piece, which was accepted without any ceremony.

Fabreguette soon reached the Place de la Concorde, and began to ascend the main avenue of the Champs Elysees. At the corner of the Rue de Marbeuf, he threw away his nearly consumed cigar, substituting his pipe, in order to make himself look as much as possible like a house-painter in search of a job.

The carriage-making establishment in which he had once been employed was near the corner of the street, and in the door-way he perceived a journeyman with whom he was acquainted. The moment had come for the exercise of the diplomatic talent which Fabreguette possessed in a marked degree, and which did not fail him now. He accosted the man politely, even humbly, and inquired if he had any work for him. The reply was in the negative. Our friend had been employed at a busy time, but the establishment had its own corps of painters, and employed outsiders only occasionally. Fabreguette expressed his profound regret, and proceeded to explain that as his noble art seemed to be under a cloud, he found himself reduced to painting signs and ceilings.

“I don’t mind work,” said he, “and am ready to do anything to earn an honest living. You don’t happen to know any one in this neighborhood who would like to have his portrait done in oils or in crayon? I will guarantee a good likeness.”

“No; they prefer photographs.”

“Oh, these photographers!” exclaimed Fabreguette, lifting his hands despairingly to heaven. “They take the bread out of the very mouths of us artists!”

“Wait a moment,” replied the worthy journeyman.

“You said that you paint walls, too, I believe.”

“Yes, and I haven’t my equal in that line. Last year I frescoed the ceiling of a billiard-room at Belleville, and people from Pantin, Aubervilliers and Bondy flocked to see it.”

“You won’t have such a chance to display your talent in this case, but near the end of the street, there is a big barrack that has stood vacant for ten years. The owner has at last succeeded in leasing it to a man who intends to live in it, I hear. He must be an idiot, for the house stands in such a deep hollow that one might as well live in a cave. That is his business, however. He has already sent some furniture there and I hear he is going to have the whole house done up before he moves in. He may want to employ a painter or decorator. Why not go and see? A man-servant sleeps there at night, and he must be there now, as I saw him pass only a few minutes ago.”

“I’ll take your advice, and go at once. Thanks, old fellow! You’ll take a drink with me, when I come back, I am sure, if I get the job.”

“I sha’n’t refuse. The house is on the left hand side, just below where the street makes a turn. There is a big knocker on the door instead of a bell.”

“Don’t be afraid. I shall find it,” replied Fabreguette, immediately beginning to descend the steep hill of the Rue de Marbeuf.

At the foot of this hill the street made a turn, and when Fabreguette came to this turn, he perceived only about twenty yards from him the building in question, which was as massively built as a fortress. Every shutter was closed, and there was nothing to indicate that the house was inhabited.

“Ah, here it is!” muttered the artist. “Well, it wears a mysterious air that increases my desire to enter it.”

And without wasting any more time in deliberation, Fabreguette crossed the street, and seizing the knocker, began to ply it vigorously. But there was no response to this resounding summons, and Fabreguette knocked again, and still more loudly, but with no better success.

A slight sound made him raise his head. A shutter in the second story had just been partially opened, and after an instant’s hesitation, a voice cried:

“Wait, I’ll be down in a moment.”

A moment afterward Fabreguette heard a heavy step

slowly approaching, then the key grated in the lock, and a strange figure appeared in the door-way; the smoothly shaven face of a tall, thin old man, as straight as a poplar, dressed in black from head to foot, and wearing a white cravat; in short, the very personification of a model *valet de chambre*.

“What do you want?” inquired this highly respectable personage, maintaining his distrustful attitude and manner.

“Excuse me for disturbing you,” replied Fabreguette, giving a military salute, “but I am a house-painter and decorator, and a friend, who lives in the neighborhood, tells me that you want some work done in that line.”

“That depends. Are you capable of painting four large panels in the dining-room?”

“I should say so. In fact, that is my specialty, and I know exactly what you want.”

“You seem to understand your business,” interrupted the man in black, “but I don’t know about your prices. Should they prove satisfactory we might strike a bargain; but I can settle upon nothing without consulting my master, and I warn you that he will probably want to see what you can do before he employs you, or, in other words, to take you on trial.”

“That suits me, but before telling you the cost of the work, I must see how much there is to do; for, as you can very readily understand, panels, fifteen feet by ten, will cost much more than smaller ones.”

“Of course,” replied the valet, smiling. “Well, I will show you the room, and you can take your measurements and make an estimate, which I will show to the marquis to-morrow.”

“Then the gentleman is not here?”

“No, the house is not yet completely furnished, and he will not occupy it until it is all ready for his reception. But it is not necessary for you to see him. I act as his steward, and he has given me *carte blanche* in everything connected with the interior of the house.”

As he spoke, the major domo opened the door a little wider, and the artist saw that his face was exceedingly repulsive.

“Come in, if you want to look at the dining-room,” he said, rather crossly. “I have no time to waste.”

Fabreguette, anxious to conclude the adventure which had begun so auspiciously, stepped quickly over the threshold. The steward allowed him to pass, then closed the double doors and bolted them securely.

"You seem to be afraid I shall run away," remarked Fabreguette, with a forced laugh, and a sudden sinking of heart.

"It is not that, but I don't want to be bothered, and you can have no idea how troublesome the neighbors are. I don't want them coming in without my permission, like two boys I found playing marbles in the vestibule, the other day, when I had forgotten to close and lock the outer door."

It was quite dark in the hall, but at the further end of it, Fabreguette managed to discern a staircase that was probably lighted from above.

"I will go on ahead, and you can follow me," remarked the steward.

Fabreguette did so, and perceived that the stairway was surmounted by a skylight which was at least fifty feet above the ground floor. This arrangement, so unusual in a private house, reminded Fabreguette strongly of the stairway in the north tower, and it occurred to him that this house was very like a rat-trap. It had been an easy matter to enter it, but he could not leave it without the permission of its keeper, who had the appearance of being much more vigilant and less obliging than the Angel of the Bells.

But the artist of the Rue de la Huchette had too much vanity to admit, even to himself, that he had committed an imprudent act; on the contrary, he was still congratulating himself upon his victory over the prudence of this Cerberus in livery.

The man in black paused upon the first landing, which was even more dimly lighted than the staircase, and opening a door, stepped aside to let Fabreguette pass. In the middle of the room into which he was thus ushered, stood a table upon which two candles were burning in silver candlesticks. But for the light thus furnished, the darkness would have been complete, for all the shutters were tightly closed, and the artist could not refrain from saying to his guide:

"Does the sunlight hurt your eyes, that you thus turn day into night?"

"That is not the reason," replied the steward, "but I am only here for a few minutes to-day. My master sent me for a cigar-case that he left in his bedroom, and I did not think it worth while to open the window for a quarter of an hour's stay. I am going, as soon as you have seen the room you want to see. You were very lucky to catch me here."

"Then you are not staying in the house?"

"Not yet, but I visit it every day, and shall continue to do so while you are at work. You will probably have an opportunity to see Monsieur le Marquis, too, for he will doubtless be anxious to see your work for himself. He pays liberally, and he wants his work to be well done."

"He is right. I should feel in the same way if I were rich."

"There are very few who are as rich as Monsieur le Marquis. He hardly knows the extent of his wealth; but he watches all his expenditures closely, and knows the value of things."

"He must be a foreigner. Frenchmen throw their money away when they have any."

"Monsieur le Marquis is a Spanish grandee."

"A Spanish grandee! I don't know what that is, but it certainly sounds well. Is he going to settle down permanently in Paris?"

"Possibly. He travels a great deal, and when he finds a country that he likes, he settles himself as comfortably as if he intended to remain there ten years. Come, and I will show you the dining-room."

The steward, candle in hand, conducted the artist into a bedroom, or at least into a room where there was a bed and several chairs. This bed had been slept in, but no one had taken the trouble to make it up again. The covers were disordered, and the pillows still bore the impress of the two heads that had rested there.

Fabreguette, who noted all these details, instantly concluded that the unfortunate countess had spent the night in this room with her husband.

"It is certain that this fool does not regard me with suspicion," the artist said to himself, "for if he mistrusted what brought me here, he would not show me all this."

His astonishment was not at an end, however, for, after passing through this chamber, he was ushered into a dress-

ing-room, where he saw a toilet table, and a small iron bedstead.

“It was here that they put Sacha,” thought Fabreguette.

Beyond this dressing-room was another apartment, containing six chairs and a round table, upon which the remains of a breakfast were still standing—conclusive proof that the house had been deserted by its master on the day following the arrival of the countess, and that the steward had not set foot in it since, in spite of his assertions to the contrary.

“Your Spanish grandee takes his meals here, I judge,” remarked Fabreguette, carelessly.

“Monsieur le Marquis take his meals upon an oil-cloth, and eat from stone china dishes! It is very evident that you do not know him. You certainly are not very shrewd, if you have not divined that these are the remains of my breakfast.”

“You must have had company. I see there are three covers,” interrupted Fabreguette, who could not hold his tongue.

“It strikes me that you are very inquisitive. I don’t like workmen who meddle with matters that do not concern them.”

“Excuse me, patron; I meant no harm, and I will not offend again, if you will show me the panels. I must measure them before setting my price.”

The steward made no reply; but opening a door, motioned Fabreguette to pass in first. The latter did so, but he had hardly set foot in the room when the door slammed noisily behind him.

He suddenly found himself in total darkness, but his first thought was that the door had shut of its own accord, and that the steward, whom he took for an arrogant fool, was not the cause of the accident.

He called out lustily therefore, and pounded vigorously upon the heavy door, but when he listened breathlessly for some response, no sound greeted his ears.

Not until then did our imprudent friend begin to recover from his illusions. The scales fell from his eyes, and he wondered how he could have fallen into such a palpable trap, for the willingness with which the man had admitted

him into the house now seemed decidedly suspicious. In short, he fully realized that he was a prisoner.

He began to explore the apartment, and his sense of touch soon satisfied him that the room was square, and much too small for a dining-room. In fact, it was more like a cell constructed to conceal a fugitive, like those in many houses at the time of the revolution, and our unfortunate friend stood a very good chance of stifling for want of air, if long confined there.

This discovery very naturally excited great alarm in the poor artist's breast, and he had not recovered from it, when a sharp click like that of a lock attracted his attention; and almost instantly a gleam of light appeared. Dazzled at first by this abrupt transition from darkness to light, he rubbed his eyes, and then discerned through a square opening which had suddenly appeared in one of the walls, the wrinkled face of the old man who had breakfasted at the next table in the restaurant on the Boulevard Saint-Michel.

This hideous old man was surveying him intently through his blue spectacles, and smiling sneeringly under his long gray beard. In his hand was the silver candlestick that had been in the steward's possession a few moments before, and he held it in such a way that the light fell full upon his wrinkled visage.

Fabreguette thought he must be dreaming, and tried to arouse himself, but the sound of the old man's voice soon dispelled this fancy.

"Ah, well, young man!" exclaimed this mocking voice, "you tried to fool me, but the tables have been turned. This is what one gets by turning detective. The person with whom you had to deal was shrewder than you thought. Ah! ha! you begin to see that I know how to disguise myself at will; but the knowledge comes a little too late. You should have recognized me when I opened the street door. You might have made your escape, then."

"So it was you—"

"Who occupied the table next yours in the restaurant where you took breakfast. I followed you there from the Rue Casette, and heard every word you said, for I am no more deaf than you are. When I learned where you proposed to go as soon as the meal was concluded, I hastened out, took a carriage, and arrived here fully three quarters of an hour in advance of you. This gave me plenty of

time to turn myself into a valet de chambre, and if you now see me again in the rôle of a poor old man, it is only because I want to show you what a fool you are. What! is it possible that you don't enjoy the joke?"

Fabreguette felt no desire to laugh. He felt a wild desire to spring at his tormentor's throat, but he could scarcely pass his hand through the tiny opening, and the scoundrel took good care to keep out of his reach.

"Yes, I have allowed myself to be entrapped," the prisoner replied, in a voice choked with anger; "and it is very evident that I can't get out of this place unless you will let me out; but why don't you tell me what you are going to do with me."

"Well, you are in the trap, and I am going to leave you there."

"Until I perish of hunger?"

"Yes; and that will not be very long, unless you took the precaution to bring some provisions with you."

"What will you gain by my death?"

"In the first place, I shall have the pleasure of ridding myself of a spy. Besides, you belong to a band of estimable creatures that I propose to exterminate to the very last man, in order to punish them for presuming to meddle with our affairs."

"I don't understand," murmured Fabreguette, who understood only too well, however.

"Don't play the fool. You know very well what I mean. You and two or three other idiots have taken it into your heads to annoy a man who has never troubled you, for he was not even aware of your existence. You are very kindly plotting to send him to the guillotine; and he has a perfect right to defend himself. You are not the originator of the plot, however, and you can get yourself out of the scrape if you choose."

"Are you trying to make a bargain with me?"

"I have no authority to do so; but I will perhaps assume the responsibility of releasing you, if—"

"If what?"

"If you will assist me in getting hold of the child."

"The child!" stammered Fabreguette, "what child?"

"Don't try that game again," exclaimed the frightful old man. "Understand, once for all, that I know every

one of you, and all your plans as well. To defeat them I must have the child."

"To kill him, doubtless."

"What is that to you? He is not your child. Indeed, you scarcely know him."

"But you forget that I am a prisoner."

"That does not prevent you from telling me the arrangement of the house where he is."

"I am not familiar with the house."

"The house is composed of three separate suites of apartments. You must know in which one of the three the boy sleeps."

"And if I should tell you, you would go and take him away in the night, I suppose."

"Perhaps so; but I should prefer to employ less violent measures. You might, for example, write to Meriadec that you want him to come here with the child."

"Do you think he would come?"

"Yes, if you would write him that you had found the gentleman he is looking for, and that you would like the child to see him in order that he might identify him."

Fabreguette grew cold to the very marrow of his bones. This scoundrel must be a veritable sorcerer to have thus divined the plans of Sacha's defenders; and he was quite capable of profiting by this knowledge in setting a trap for the child and the young girl who was to accompany him. But the worthy fellow quickly recovered himself, and decided that it would be better to conceal his indignation, and even pretend to enter into the views of the murderer's accomplice, in order to gain time. He did not yet despair of making his escape; and it was of the utmost importance that he should gain a knowledge of many things of which he was now ignorant.

While he was engaged in these reflections, the scoundrel removed his wig, false beard and blue spectacles, and resumed the costume and manner of a valet.

"Ah, you can justly boast of a rare talent for disguising yourself!" exclaimed Fabreguette.

"And you will find me to be the possessor of many other talents if we become allies," sneered this strange personage. "In fact, there is nothing for you to do but place yourself on the strongest side. You have little or nothing to gain with your friends of the Rue Cassette, while if you

will serve us faithfully, your fortune is made. My master has a long arm, and he rakes in gold by the shovelful."

"Your master? Say rather your friend. You can scarcely hope to make me believe that you are only a servant."

"It matters little what I am. I am authorized to say what I do; and I advise you to accept the terms I offer. Indeed, it is your only chance of saving your life."

"I ask nothing better; but a letter from me would not produce the effect you anticipate. Meriadec has never seen my handwriting. He would think the signature forged, and refuse to move an inch."

"That would depend entirely upon the manner in which you write. You can easily invent a story that will deceive the old simpleton. Make up some story to entice them here, one after another; and, when they are all in our power, we will not only restore you to liberty, but pay you well."

"To promise is one thing and to keep one's promise is another. What assurance have I that you will not put me out of the way, too?"

"My word ought to be sufficient; besides, if you were to refuse you will only perish the sooner. Between the certainty of dying of starvation, and the hope of escaping from this place there is certainly no room for hesitation. Decide!"

"But you must give me time to invent some plan, for it will be no easy matter to entrap three men who are on their guard, and a girl who is no fool—for you want the girl, too, I suppose."

"We want the child and every person who has seen him; and we shall get them, even though you refuse to aid us. But you will aid us, for you have too much shrewdness not to be able to devise a means to accomplish the desired end. I will give you forty-eight hours. Day after to-morrow afternoon I will come to learn the result of your meditations."

"And you propose to leave me here without a light and without food?"

"You ought not to complain. You can reflect much better in the dark, as you will have nothing to distract your attention. On my next visit I will bring pen and ink. You can recite the letter to me, for you will have plenty of

time to learn it by heart. If it proves satisfactory, you can write it out forthwith, and I will deliver it myself. Then, if Meriadec falls into the trap, you shall be free after you have given us a satisfactory guarantee, for you might take it into your head to betray me as soon as I set you at liberty."

"What guarantee? I do not understand you."

"I shall make you sign a writing in which you admit that, of your own free will and for a stated compensation, you indicated the means of separating the child from his protector. The amount will be specified as ten thousand francs; and I will pay you this sum as soon as Meriadec and the child are in my custody. I have no intention of capturing all our enemies at once. The others will take their turn later. I am very reasonable, you see."

This was too much. Fabreguette had managed to restrain his wrath until now; but he could control it no longer, and shaking his fist at his jailer, he shouted:

"You vile wretch! how dare you ask me to barter the lives of a child and a brave man for a paltry ten thousand francs?"

"Make it twelve thousand then," sneered his tormentor.

"Silence, scoundrel! If you offered me a million, I would not betray my friends. You can leave me here to die of hunger; but you and your vile friend will obtain no concessions of me. Nor will your pretended marquis escape justice. He will be denounced this evening and arrested to-morrow."

"Thanks for the information. I will go and warn the dear marquis."

Fabreguette saw that he had been guilty of a great imprudence; but his rage was now entirely beyond his control, and he continued to hurl opprobrious epithets at his jailer, who had gradually approached the opening.

"Avaunt, vile beast!" he fairly shrieked. "I never want to see your Judas-like face again."

And fairly wild with passion, he spat full in his tormentor's face.

"Starve, then, you fool!" said the man in black, hastily closing and fastening the sliding window.

Fabreguette now had nothing to look forward to but death—and what a death!

CHAPTER VI.

MEANWHILE Rose Verdiere had employed her time to much better advantage. One can accomplish a good deal in a day; and an afternoon had sufficed for the removal of her household goods and her installation in the rooms which Meriadec had placed at her disposal.

She had also found time to take Sacha to the club-house in the Champs Elysees, and to wait there with him in a carriage from five o'clock to seven; but Paul Constantinowitch had not made his appearance; and on returning from this fruitless expedition, Sacha had announced his determination not to repeat it.

On the following day Rose took him with her to the hospital, whither she went to visit her father, whom she found in a very critical condition. He had partially recovered from the attack of apoplexy that had stricken him down; but his right side was still paralyzed, and he had not yet regained his power of speech. Daubrac, nevertheless, declared that he might live some time, and did not altogether despair of his ultimate recovery.

Sacha had behaved admirably during the visit; and Daubrac, being very agreeably surprised, made much over the lad, who urged him to go back with them to breakfast, which invitation was promptly accepted by the young surgeon, who escorted Rose Verdiere back to the Rue Cassette, where the baron received them with open arms.

Nothing was wanting to complete the enjoyment of the participants in this festive repast save the company of the jovial artist; but Fabreguette did not make his appearance, though he had promised to call every day at noon to hold a conversation with his allies. Daubrac ought to have recollected that the artist was about starting for the Rue de Marbeuf when he saw him last, and that some misfortune might have befallen him; but he now forgot this fact entirely, and even declared that he was going that evening to his garret on the Rue de la Huchette, where he was doubtless sleeping away the day, instead of presenting himself at the baron's house, according to promise.

They also spoke of the captain, who had not promised

to return, but whom it was necessary to keep advised of the progress of the campaign. They had nothing new to tell him as yet; besides, he did not seem to want these gentlemen to come to his house; so any and all communications would have to be made in writing.

Meriadec had not received the expected summons to appear before the magistrate, nor had Daubrac; so they rather rashly concluded that the investigation had been abandoned. The conference was broken up by the young girl, who said that she must go about three o'clock to take home some work that she had barely time to finish.

"Will you have the goodness to show me how artificial flowers are made?" asked Daubrac. "I haven't the slightest idea."

"Very willingly," replied Rose, "if you will follow me to the apartment which Monsieur de Meriadec has allowed me to convert into a work-room."

"I am going, too," exclaimed Sacha, "and when I get tired of seeing you work I can look at the pictures in the big books in the library. The baron will explain them to me."

This arrangement suited Meriadec, who took great pleasure in Sacha's society; and was eminently satisfactory to Daubrac and Rose Verdiere, who had many things to say to each other.

The library, which was also used as a smoking-room by the baron, adjoined the work-room, and it was necessary to traverse that first. Sacha paused there on perceiving the books—immense folios, bound in crimson morocco—"Don Quixote" and "Rabelais," illustrated by Gustave Dore.

Meriadec lifted the child, placed him upon a high ottoman, opened the first volume, and began to show him the engravings depicting the adventures of his favorite hero, the last of the knights-errant.

Daubrac followed the young girl into the work-room; but about three o'clock he went away, and the young girl prepared to take her flowers to an establishment on the Rue de Rivoli. Both went out quietly, in order not to attract the attention of Sacha.

Rose soon performed her errand, and having received her money, she started off thoughtfully toward her new home. She was thinking of her sick father, and of the void his

death would make in her life. Engrossed by thoughts like these, she mechanically entered the square that surrounded the tower of Saint-Jacques, and seated herself in the shadow of the tower.

It was a place of which she was very fond; and in pleasant weather she seldom failed to stop there for a few moments after leaving the store on the Rue de Rivoli.

The square wore its usual aspect, though it was perhaps rather more lively than usual, on account of the superb weather; and Rose seated herself near one of the buttresses of the tower, and again abandoned herself to her sorrowful reflections.

A man soon passed without paying any attention to her—a man she noticed particularly, because he was so unlike the majority of the visitors.

This man was certainly a gentleman, and not a clerk or tradesman, like the others.

He was tall and well formed, and dressed with tasteful elegance. His like was seldom seen in the square of the tower Saint-Jacques, and he had evidently come there to meet some one who had not yet arrived, for he gazed persistently in the direction of the Place du Chatelet, and after standing for a few moments in the middle of the walk, took a seat in one of the corners of the buttress close to the young girl. They could not see each other, being separated by the stone wall; but she knew he was there, for she had heard the back of his chair graze the wall, and the gravel creak under his feet.

From the place he had selected he could command a view of the whole square, and even one end of the Pont au Change, which connects the right bank of the Seine with the square.

He lighted a cigar, the smoke of which would have revealed his presence to his neighbor had he desired to conceal himself, but he did not seem to trouble himself in the least about her, probably because he had not noticed she was there.

Rose would have found it very difficult to explain her interest in this stranger. She did not know him; and there was nothing extraordinary about his appearance or manner; but there are inexplicable impressions which amount to positive presentiments.

She was about to rise and return to the Rue Cassette

when she saw, entering the square, a man who seemed to exchange signals with her neighbor. The new-comer advanced with a rapid tread, and apparently without even seeing her, and a fear of attracting his attention made her keep her seat. This man, too, was a stranger to her; and though he was much less distinguished in appearance than his friend, he was quite as fashionably dressed.

The two gentlemen exchanged greetings, and then seated themselves, side by side, behind the buttress, so that Rose Verdiere could not help hearing their conversation, even if they talked in subdued tones. Anxious, now, to know if there was any foundation for her suspicions, or if she had mistaken two honest gentleman for Paul Constantinowitch's accomplices, she remained.

"I have some good news for you," said the new-comer. "The letter reached its destination in safety."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly sure. I handed it to the man on guard at the door of the magistrate's office, telling him it was of great importance, and presented him with a hundred-sou piece which he pocketed with great satisfaction. Our dear judge was engaged in hearing witnesses at the time, but the examination was drawing to a close, and the letter must have been delivered ere this."

"Then the *denouement* is not far off, and our dear captain will soon find himself in a nice scrape."

"If the fool of a husband does not arrive too late. The lady was to visit her lover at three o'clock, and it is after three now."

Rose, who had not lost a single word of this dialogue, was beginning to understand.

Heaven must have inspired the Angel of the Bells with the idea of setting herself there. The words, "examining witnesses," had aroused her suspicions, but she did not fully comprehend the situation until the first-comer sneeringly remarked: "Our dear captain will soon find himself in a nice scrape."

He evidently referred to M. de Saint-Briac, and these wretches had just denounced to her husband the lady who had made the ascent of the tower with him. The partial disclosures which he had made to his new friends of the Rue Casette left no possible doubt in the mind of Rose Verdiere,

who had listened with the closest attention. She had even remembered his address.

Feeling that she had no time to lose if she would prevent a double tragedy, Rose sprung up to hasten to the Avenue d'Antin; but the next remark that she heard, deterred her.

"Between ourselves, my dear fellow," continued the last arrival, "I think you are too sanguine. We are by no means sure that the husband will blow the captain's brains out. Magistrates are not in the habit of carrying revolvers in their pockets. If the case is not brought before the courts, it will probably end in a duel in which all the chances will be in Saint-Briac's favor. Should he survive it, he will have no difficulty in discovering who denounced him, and we shall find him an implacable enemy. He has already formed an alliance, as you know, with that tall lunatic, who has taken Sacha under his protection, and so knows the whereabouts of the young rascal who nearly caused your arrest the other day at the morgue, and who will certainly identify you some day or other. Saint-Briac will only have to send him to watch for you at the door of your club, between the hours of four and five."

"I am not going there any more, and you know I have left the Continental. In less than a week from this time, we shall have crossed the frontier, but I will not leave France until this man has received a lesson."

"I understand, but I think you should have begun by suppressing Sacha. The captain is not dangerous; it is the Rue Casette clique that is to be feared. You have put the cart before the horse, as the saying is, but fortunately I am on hand to repair your blunders. I have a little plan that promises finely, and by the time you succeed in getting the captain in your power, that little serpent will be in our clutches, I promise you that. The dead alone tell no tales. So you had better wring his neck."

"That is exactly what I intend to do. When do you expect to get hold of him?"

"This evening. I have already captured one of our enemies, and I shall soon secure the others. But it is Sacha we want most, and I have invented a trap to catch him."

"Don't talk so loud. We might be overheard."

"By whom? We are alone in our niche, and behind

this wall there is no one but a nurse girl and some children who are making an infernal racket."

"Still, it is very imprudent to talk over secrets out-of-doors, and we had better take ourselves off without delay. I know where we stand, and that is enough. There is nothing for me to do now, but await the effect of the bomb-shell which is about to explode on the Avenue d'Antin. As to that other matter, you can explain as you accompany me to my carriage, which is waiting for me in front of the Hôtel de Ville."

"As you please, but I must leave you there, for I am anxious to finish with the pretty orphan of the Rue Casette before night."

Rose, crouching closely against the wall that screened her from view, heard the two scoundrels rise, and bowed her head upon her breast for fear that they would glance at her in passing; but they did not pay the slightest attention to her, and she saw them leave the square and walk down the Avenue Victoria.

The first thing to be done now was to warn those who were threatened with approaching danger, and she resolved to do it even if she were obliged to incur great personal risk. But to whom should she hasten first? Sacha interested her much more deeply than M. de Saint-Briac and a woman who was deceiving her husband.

Rose, like all honest girls, was rather wanting in charity toward the erring of her own sex, and she felt no very great desire to save this lady from her peril. She did not even know her, and consequently owed her no assistance, and her first impulse was to leave her to the fate she doubtless deserved.

But the captain remained to be considered, and the captain was an ally, and a valuable ally; so Rose could not bear the idea of leaving him to be taken unawares by a furious enemy, when it was in her power to warn him and thus avert the catastrophe.

There was nothing to deter her from giving this warning except the danger that threatened Sacha. The scoundrels certainly intended to make a desperate effort to secure possession of the child that they might kill him, and one of them had expressed a strong hope of succeeding that very evening. This, doubtless, meant that he intended to wait until night, before making the attempt, for, however bold

he might be, he would hardly try to force his way into the house on the Rue Casette in broad daylight. Meriadec was there to defend his home, and he would guard the child so diligently that strategy would prove as ineffectual as violence. There was no great haste so far as Sacha was concerned, consequently; but not a moment was to be lost if she wished to warn the captain.

“By taking a carriage, I can reach the Avenue d’Antin in twenty minutes,” Rose said to herself. “It will take me only a moment to explain the situation to Monsieur Saint-Briac, and the same carriage can take me back to the Rue Casette where I will relate my discovery to Monsieur de Meriadec, who will take the necessary measures to protect Sacha. In that case, my day will not have been wasted, and Monsieur Daubrac will be well pleased with me.”

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER leaving his new friends on the Rue Casette, Jacques de Saint-Briac returned home, and left it again that day, only to go to the club at the time of M. de Pancorbo’s daily visit, and at the hour Rose was to be there in company with Sacha.

He saw the carriage from which Rose and the child were watching, but he did not see the Spanish marquis, though he waited for him so long that he was obliged to dine at the club.

His neighbors at table were persons with whom he was but slightly acquainted, and not being in very good humor himself, he opened his lips only to eat; but the hidalgo was the chief topic of conversation, and the general opinion expressed in regard to that gentleman’s character and antecedents was anything but flattering.

One of the guests remarked that having gone to call on the marquis, at the Continental, he was told that the gentleman had left some hours before. Was this departure final? Such did not seem to be the general impression, for a fortunate player is not wont to suddenly disappear, but generally lingers to take advantage of his good luck. It is only the unfortunate who mysteriously disappear in order to avoid paying their debts.

But the captain had his reasons for thinking that M. de

Pancorbo would not be seen at the baccarat-table again, and even that M. de Pancorbo was making arrangements to leave *la belle* France forever; nor was the idea of this hasty departure by any means unpleasing to the captain.

Saint-Briac was not particularly anxious to punish the murderer of the Countess Xenia, nor even to avenge the undeserved arrest to which he, himself, had been subjected; but his one desire was to preserve the woman he loved from a terrible misfortune, and this man's departure would relieve him of a great anxiety. He already reproached himself bitterly for having declared war against him, and regretted the alliance he had formed with Meriadec and Sacha's other defenders. They ran no risk in opening hostilities, but the captain fully realized the imminence of his danger, and racked his brain to discover some way of securing an interview with Mme. de Malverne.

Failing in this, he remained at the club and endeavored to divert his thoughts by taking part in an exciting game of cards, after which he returned home and went to bed in a still more wretched frame of mind.

"The night brings counsel," and Saint-Briac, awakening in a more calm and reasonable mood, promptly decided that he would go and see Mme. de Malverne that very day. She received between the hours of five and six, and he might reasonably hope to find her alone if he went to the house at about half past four, and even if he should not be the first to arrive, he would certainly find an opportunity for a few moments' *tête-à-tête*.

Suspense is the worst of all evils, and Jacques, somewhat comforted by the resolve he had just made, breakfasted with a very fair appetite. He then returned home again, for he needed an hour or two of solitude in which to prepare for the interview which was to sever his connection with Odette forever.

Throwing himself into a large arm-chair, he reviewed the favorable and unfavorable chances that remained for him. He had heard nothing from his allies since his visit to the Rue Casette, so everything promised well in that direction, and it was not improbable that the dangerous Spaniard had left France, and that all would yet go well.

Slightly reassured by this review of the condition of affairs, the thought of glancing over the daily papers that were lying on the table near by, occurred to him. He un-

folded one, and glanced at the "personals," rather from force of habit than anything else, for he had no expectation of finding a communication addressed to him.

He was mistaken, for at the head of the second column of notices he saw in capitals the word, ODE. He gave a violent start, so great was his surprise, for it was the beginning of the name Odette, and the sign agreed upon between Mme. de Malverne and himself should they find it necessary to communicate with each other in this way. When the message was addressed to him, the three capital letters employed formed the word: CAP., an abbreviation for captain.

But Saint-Briac had inserted no such notice the evening before, so he gazed in astonishment at the three letters. He could scarcely believe his eyes; and he asked himself in alarm who could have resorted to this means to attract Mme. de Malverne's attention.

"What if it should be Pancorbo who has resorted to this ruse to ruin her?" the captain said to himself, in terror.

Below this heading he saw the following lines:

"I shall expect to see you to-morrow, Thursday, at three o'clock."

"Thursday, that is to-day!" exclaimed the captain. "Some one has notified Odette that I wish to see her here. It is a trap some one has set for her, and the author of this atrocious falsehood must have informed Hugh. He hopes that she will come, and that her husband, warned by an anonymous letter, will find her here. I must save her. I will hasten to her house at once. But it is too late!" he murmured, striking the table with his clinched fist. "If she has seen this abominable notice she is already on her way here. If I attempt to go to her, we shall perhaps miss each other on the way, and if I should meet her, Malverne might see us together, and he would regard that as sufficient proof of the justice of his suspicions. It will be better for me to wait for her here. Fortunately I am alone—and my servants will not return for sometime. When she comes, I will open the door myself. Ah! I can no longer doubt that this is the work of the scoundrel who killed the countess, but how has he managed to discover that we occasionally correspond through the papers?"

He tried hard to devise some means of averting the danger. To open the door himself would do very well, but it

was important to know for whom he was opening it, as he ran a great risk of admitting monsieur instead of madame.

“If she only arrives first, all will be well. When she is once here, I care not how soon Hugh presents himself, for while I am talking with him, Odette can open a window and jump down into the court-yard. It is not much of a leap as the window is only a few feet from the ground, and the turf extends up to the house wall. No one will see her, for the servants are out, and the other tenants have gone to the country. After she has made her escape by way of the porte cochere, I will take particular pains to show Hugh through my rooms, and seeing that his wife is not here, it would not surprise me if he asked my pardon for his unjust suspicions. If he does, I shall take advantage of the opportunity to ask him to show me the anonymous letter he must have received. If it is in the same handwriting as the letter addressed to me—and I am sure it is—I shall show Monsieur de Pancorbo no further mercy, but denounce him without delay, and persuade Hugh to summon Meriadec and his friends for examination. They will bring Sacha with them, and tell Hugh the child’s history.”

While Saint-Briac was still standing at the window looking out upon the Avenue d’Antin, and congratulating himself upon the invention of these effectual means of averting the threatened danger, he saw Mme. de Malverne appear at the end of the avenue.

She was very plainly dressed in black, and wore a veil, but he recognized her, even at that distance, by her figure and gait.

“It is she,” he muttered. “She arrives in advance of Malverne. We are saved, if we exercise a little prudence.”

After casting a hasty glance up and down the avenue, he left the window and hurried to the door, so as to be ready to open it the instant Odette rang. He did not have to wait long, however, and recognizing her step, he opened the door before she had time to place her hand upon the bell knob. She was almost out of breath after her rapid walk, and on entering the parlor into which Jacques hastily ushered her, she sunk into an arm-chair, and exclaimed:

“I was so frightened! I could not help thinking that some one was following me, and instead of coming straight here I went round by the Place de la Concorde, so you must

forgive me for being late. It was not my fault, I assure you.

"It is not my fault, I assure you," she continued. "I have been longing to come ever since this morning. I was so pleased when I saw in the personals the notice beginning with the first letters of my name."

"And you thought that message came from me?"

"How could I have thought otherwise? And why do you ask me such a question?"

"Because it was a trap that some one has set for us. Nothing could have induced me to make such a request after what occurred the other day."

"But who can have done it?" exclaimed Mme. de Malverne, springing up.

"A wretch who has discovered our secret, and who wishes to be revenged on me."

"But in what way?"

"By writing to your husband that if he will come here between three and four o'clock, he will find you."

"What makes you think so?"

"My reason. The false advertisement can have been inserted with no other object than to injure us, and this infernal scheme would prove ineffectual if its author had not denounced you to your husband at the same time that he lured you here by a false personal."

"You knew all this, and yet did not warn me?"

"I first opened the paper only a few moments ago; and it was then too late to warn you. But I have invented a plan to save you. I watched your approach from the window, and satisfied myself that your husband was not in sight. He may arrive at any moment, and if he does, I will detain him while you flee through the court-yard."

"Flee!" repeated Odette, frowning.

"Yes, the window is only a couple of feet from the ground; and I can see no other way. If you should leave the house now by the door through which you entered it, you might meet your husband, who is likely to come at any moment."

"And what if I should insist upon remaining?"

"You certainly can not think of such a thing!"

"And why not? You are a family friend. I certainly have a right to call on my husband's most intimate friend if I choose."

“You forget the new position in which a strange fatality has placed us. You forget that I was arrested in consequence of our unfortunate visit to Notre Dame. Malverne set me at liberty because I swore to him that I ascended the tower with a lady whose name I refused to disclose with a persistence which must have appeared very strange to him. An anonymous letter has just informed him that you were the lady in question. Can you doubt that his suspicions will be aroused, especially when this accusation fully explains my obstinate refusal to make him my confidant, though by so doing I could have cleared myself of the charge of murder which had been made against me?”

Mme. de Malverne had turned very pale, and her features worked convulsively; but there were no tears in the glittering eyes she riveted upon the captain's face.

“Yes. I see that I am lost,” she cried, after a moment's silence. “Hugh would perhaps forgive me; but the world will show me no mercy. Ah, well, so much the better! I am tired of this life of deception, tired of lying, tired of playing the devoted wife to a man I do not love. I am weary of this life of hypocrisy, and I will endure it no longer.”

“Odette!” exclaimed Saint-Briac, alarmed by this violent outburst.

“Yes,” she exclaimed passionately, “I am resolved to be free again, to leave France, where I have suffered so much. We will leave France together, you and I, never to return. I am ready. When shall we start?”

The captain, astonished by this unexpected outburst, knew not what to reply.

“You are silent! You hesitate! You, who have so often cursed the marriage to which I consented only because you had gone away, and I was told I should never see you again.”

“I still curse it, but—”

“But you are too cowardly to sacrifice your peace of mind for my sake, or to brave the opinion of the world. Ah, well, then I will depart alone, as you had rather break my heart than forget your obligations to a friend.”

Saint-Briac, in his despair, was perhaps about to reply: “I consent. We will go,” when a violent peal of the bell resounded through the room.

“It is your husband,” he whispered. “Conceal your—

self in the next room; and when you hear his voice make your escape in the way I indicated."

"No," replied Odette, firmly. "I shall remain unless you will promise to depart with me."

The bell rang again even more violently than before.

"Would you risk your life?" cried the captain in dire dismay.

"I long to die; and I hope that he will kill me," replied Mme. de Malverne, doggedly.

"Die! when you spoke just now of living for me."

"That is my fondest wish. Swear to me that we shall leave France together, and I will obey you."

The captain, driven to desperation, gave the required promise, and Odette allowed him to push her into the next room, just as the bell rung violently for the third time.

"If I delay any longer he may burst open the door," muttered the captain, preparing to face the enemy.

But it was not Malverne; and Saint-Briac recoiled in surprise on finding himself face to face with a lady dressed in black, and as closely veiled as Odette.

"Pardon me, madame," he stammered, without evincing any disposition to admit his unknown visitor, "but you are probably mistaken in the house."

"No, I am not mistaken," was the reply. "It is you that I came to see, as you will not doubt when you have seen my face."

She lifted her veil as she spoke.

"You here, mademoiselle!" exclaimed the captain.

"Yes; and I must speak to you at once."

"Pray excuse me; but I can not admit you just now. I am not alone."

"I know. There is a lady here. Thank Heaven! I am in time."

"What do you mean?"

"I come to save her."

"Save her!" repeated Saint-Briac, in profound astonishment.

"Yes; let me in. If we remain here we shall be surprised. He is coming; you haven't a minute to lose. I will not detain you long, but I *must* tell you what has happened."

Saint-Briac realized at last that Rose Verdiere must be the bearer of important tidings. He could not send her

away without a hearing, nor prolong a conversation with her in a hall where M. de Malverne might burst in upon them at any moment.

"Come in, mademoiselle," he said, stepping aside.

The Angel of the Bells needed no urging; and the captain ushered her into the room Mme. de Malverne had just quitted.

"Sir," she began, "we know each other but slightly; but you, like Monsieur Malverne, seem to take an interest in a child whom a scoundrel has orphaned. That is a bond between us, and this child's persecutor has concocted a most atrocious plot against you. A fortunate chance just disclosed it to me. I was sitting in the square at the foot of the tower of Saint-Jacques, when two gentlemen seated themselves near me, without seeing me, however. They began to talk, and spoke of you and Sacha. One of them said he had just sent the husband of the lady you love a letter."

"To inform him that his wife is now here. I suspected as much. Did he mention his name?"

"The husband's name? No, sir; but I judged from the conversation that he is a magistrate. That was a matter that did not interest me in the least, however. The great thing was to warn you of your danger, so I took a carriage and came here, fearing all the time that I should be too late, for the wretches said the gentleman would be here at half past three."

"I am expecting him now, and have taken my precautions. He will find no one."

"Then the lady has already gone?"

"No; but she will leave as soon as her husband enters this room. By so doing, she will run no risk of meeting him at the door or in the street."

"But what if he should meet me?"

"That would do no particular harm. He does not know you, I suppose."

"How could he possibly know me? He is a man of the world, I presume; and I am only a poor working-girl."

A new idea had just struck Saint-Briac.

"Have you been examined by the judge of instruction in regard to the affair at the tower?" he inquired eagerly.

"Neither I nor Monsieur de Meriadec, nor either of the

two gentlemen you saw on the Rue Cassette; but we soon shall be, probably.”

“It is enough that you have not been examined up to the present time,” replied the captain.

He had taken good care not to tell Rose that the magistrate who would summon her as a witness was the man he feared, and he said to himself:

“If he should see her leave the house he will not know who she is; and if, when she is summoned before him to give her testimony, he should recognize her from having previously met her at the door of my house, and should ask her what she was doing here, she will certainly have the tact to reply that she came to see me about the tragedy of Notre Dame.”

“Then there are two ways of leaving your house?” inquired Rose, who had failed to understand the import of the captain’s question.

“By the windows opening upon the courtyard—we are on the lower floor, you know, and—”

The bell resounded again.

“It must be he, this time,” exclaimed Saint-Briac.

“What shall I do?” faltered the girl, who had turned pale at the sound of the bell.

The captain hesitated an instant, then said, in a decided tone:

“It won’t do for him to find you here. I know that I can trust you; and the lady who is in the next room will not be surprised to see you, as she has overheard our conversation, and knows what she has to do. When she is gone, you can make your escape in the same way.”

He opened a door—not that which Mme. de Malverne had closed and bolted, but the room in which she had taken refuge communicated with the chamber into which Saint Briac pushed Rose Verdier, saying, as he did so:

“I’ll see you to-morrow at Monsieur de Meriadec’s.”

After locking the door, and taking out the key, which he placed in his pocket, Saint-Briac listened an instant, and hearing no noise on the other side of the partition, concluded that Rose and Odette both understood the situation, and were prepared to make their escape when the right moment came.

The ring at the bell had not been repeated; and the newcomer might not be M. de Malverne after all; but who-

ever he might be, the door must be opened, and the captain, who had regained his self-possession, at least in a measure, tried to think of some means of diverting the suspicions of the husband, if this should prove to be the husband.

When he was alone at home, the captain generally smoked a pipe, and he now had the presence of mind to light one he saw lying on the table in the smoking-room which adjoined his parlor; and it was with this valuable auxiliary between his lips that he proceeded toward the door of his apartment. Just as he reached it, the bell rang again, not violently, but almost timidly.

"It is some tradesman," Saint-Briac said to himself, "that is, unless this is a ruse on the part of Malverne."

He opened the door, and seeing that it was the magistrate, he said, in the most natural tone he could assume:

"What, is it you? May the deuce take me if I expected to see you here at this hour. I thought you were at the palace."

"I just came from there," replied the judge, calmly; but the calmness was only feigned, for his face did not wear its usual expression.

"Pray come in," continued Saint-Briac. "You are probably surprised to see me opening the door myself, but both my servants have gone out, and I was about to do the same. If you had dropped in half an hour later, you would have had your labor for your pains. I was only waiting until I had finished my pipe to dress myself."

Then as he ushered M. de Malverne into the drawing-room, he continued:

"You don't smoke a pipe yourself since you became a magistrate; your greatness forbids; besides, your wife detests the smell of tobacco; but I am sure you will allow me to finish this."

All this was said in the most careless manner imaginable, and the captain marveled at his own skill as an actor; but he did not play his part without remorse, for he was deeply ashamed of his rôle.

Hugh did not seem convinced, however, for instead of seating himself in the arm-chair that Jacques had pushed toward him, he remained standing, with his hat upon his head, and his eyes fixed upon the doors leading into the adjoining rooms.

“Why, what’s the matter with you, my dear fellow?” inquired the captain, compelled to maintain his air of jovial indifference. “Has some misfortune befallen you? Oh, I understand. You are out of humor because the investigation of the Notre Dame affair is not progressing satisfactorily. Have you learned nothing new from the witnesses?”

“I have examined none of them,” replied M. de Malverne, absently. “I have been engrossed by other matters. Are you alone?”

“As you can see for yourself. If you have anything of a confidential nature to say to me, you can speak without reserve. You hesitate? Is it such a very grave matter?”

“Very grave.”

“Then it is all the more necessary that you should say what you have to say at once.”

“Listen, Jacques. You are my oldest and most intimate friend. Up to the present time not even the shadow of a cloud has ever risen between us. I have had the most implicit confidence in you.”

“This has been mutual.”

“I had no doubt of it. Ah, well, think what a shock it must have been to me when I received a letter containing a frightful accusation against you.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed the captain, ironically. “Of what am I accused now, pray? Is it another charge of having thrown that unfortunate woman from the top of the south tower?”

“Had you been accused of that, I should not have left my office to hasten here, for I am now sure that the lady who ascended the tower of Notre Dame with you is alive.”

“Well, what is it, then?” inquired Saint-Briac, forcing a smile.

“I never doubted the fact,” continued M. de Malverne; “but if I had, I should now be able to satisfy myself of her existence, for I have just learned who she is.”

“Now comes the tug of war!” thought the captain. “I must weigh my every word.”

“I think some one must be playing a joke at your expense,” he said, shrugging his shoulders, “for I am almost certain that no one saw her. Still, that doesn’t matter. Tell me her name, and if it be the true one, I will not im-

pugn the veracity of your informant. You will be in possession of a secret which I should have greatly preferred to keep; but I know that you are incapable of abusing your power."

M. de Malverne's only answer was to hold out a folded letter he had in his left hand.

"Read it," he said, in a gloomy, almost sullen tone.

The decisive moment had come. Saint-Briac's blood froze in his veins; but he summoned up all his self-control.

"This is infamous!" he cried, after a hasty glance over the opening lines. "What wretch has dared to invent this abominable slander? You do not believe it, I know; but when I learn the scoundrel's name—"

"Read it through to the end."

Saint-Briac glanced at the next page.

"I was sure of it," he said, "it is not signed; and you know the only use an honorable man ought to make of an anonymous letter."

"I should have taken no notice of it if it had not contained a specific charge. Read it, I say."

The captain would have been glad to escape the ordeal; but he could not refuse, so he began to decipher the fine, rather cramped handwriting, which he recognized at a glance as that of M. de Pancorbo's.

"The lady who ascended the tower of Notre Dame the other day, in company with Monsieur de Saint-Briac, was your wife, and if you desire to convince yourself of the fact, go to the gallant captain's house this afternoon between the hours of three and four. You will find Madame de Malverne there."

This was as clear and explicit as the demonstration of a theorem in geometry. There was no means of evading such an accusation. It must be refuted immediately, and refuted by proofs.

It was evident that Hugh intended to ask the captain to satisfy him that no one was concealed in his rooms, and the captain wished to give Odette plenty of time to make her escape in the way he had indicated. He expected that Rose Verdiere would follow her without delay, and after that all would be well, for an inspection of the apartments would convince the visitor that his suspicions were groundless.

“So you have credited this shameful accusation against me, and have come here to verify it. I do not know,” he murmured, assuming a heart-broken air. “You deserve to be left to believe it, though it would be an easy matter to convince you that your informant lies. What kind of an opinion can you have of your wife and of me to come here and act like a commissioner of police to whom the investigation of a crime has been intrusted?”

Saint-Briac had approached the door as he spoke, and raised his voice in such a way as to be distinctly heard by Odette if she were still in the next room.

“I must believe the evidence of my own senses,” replied the husband, coldly. “A lady entered this house a few moments before I did, and that lady was my wife.”

The declaration made Saint-Briac turn pale.

“Impossible! you must have dreamed this,” he stammered. “Your anger has impaired your reason and your sight.”

“I declare that the lady entered this house,” repeated M. de Malverne, with a calmness that was more alarming than any anger could have been, “a lady dressed in black, whom I recognized perfectly, though she had a veil over her face. I was just turning the corner of the avenue when I saw her. She was walking rapidly, and when she reached the *porte cochere*, she turned suddenly, and disappeared under the archway.”

“You must be mistaken, but even if you are not, what you saw is no proof that she entered my apartment, for I am not the only occupant of the house. Still less does it prove that the lady was Madame de Malverne. She must be at home at this hour, and if you would drive away these absurd fancies, you have only to hasten to your house, and I am sure that you will find her there, offering tea to her friends, for this is her reception day, and I should have gone to call on her myself had you not invaded my domicile.”

“And I am sure that she is here, that is, unless she has already had time to make her escape.”

“But how? My apartment has but one outside door, as you know.”

“But this is the lower floor, and there are windows opening upon the court-yard.”

Saint-Briac started violently, for he began to fear that he

should not be able to escape from the dangerous position in which Odette's imprudence had placed him. He made the attempt, however, by suddenly changing his tone and manner.

"The devil take you, and your absurd suspicions," he cried, accompanying the words with a scornful gesture. "As you are determined not to be convinced, I shall not attempt to convince you. Believe what you like, but let me alone."

"Your insults have no effect upon me, sir," replied Hugh, without departing from his haughty coldness. "You shall atone for them, when you atone for the rest, for I shall do you the honor to challenge you, and I expect to kill you. But I want your accomplice, and I shall not leave without her."

"Do you suppose that if there was really a lady here I would deliver her up at your command?" replied the captain, now furious with anger. "For what do you take me, sir?"

"I might reply for a traitor, for you have just destroyed a friendship of twenty years' standing by your shameful treachery; but it is not with you that I have to deal just now. You pretend that there is no one in that apartment; prove it to me by opening that door."

"I should have done so long ago if you had not made use of language that I will not tolerate. Besides, what good would it do for me to show you that the adjoining room is vacant? You would pretend that the person who took refuge there had made her escape by the window. Let us put an end to this, I beg. This ridiculous scene has lasted too long, already. We will cut each other's throats whenever you like. Nothing could please me better. But I am in my own house, and I order you to leave it."

"Not until after I have dragged your accomplice from the room in which she is concealed."

M. de Malverne sprung forward with the evident intention of bursting open the door, and Saint-Briac, now thoroughly exasperated, was about to seize him by the throat, when the overturning of a chair made them both pause. The noise proceeded from the next room, and the captain asked himself in terror if Odette could still be there.

“Do you persist in your assertion that there is no one there?” asked Hugh, sneeringly.

“No, but I forbid you to enter that room, and I swear that you shall not cross the threshold alive!” retorted Saint-Briac, hurling his pipe to the other end of the room.

The two men glared at each other like tigers thirsting for each other’s blood, but the door, threatened by one man, and defended by the other, suddenly opened, and Rose Verdiere appeared upon the threshold with face uncovered. M. de Malverne recoiled, overcome with astonishment; Saint-Briac, no less amazed, stood silent and motionless.

The girl stepped forward, with head haughtily erect, and turning to Odette’s husband, said:

“It was I, sir, whom you saw approach from the quay and enter this house. I think I perceived you at the other end of the avenue. You referred, just now, to a veiled lady, dressed in black. Don’t you recognize me as the same person?”

“Yes, it seems to me it must have been you, and yet—”

“You still have your doubts, I see. You can not understand Monsieur de Saint-Briac’s persistent denial that there was any lady here. But if he had admitted it, you would have insisted upon his naming his visitor or showing her to you, and I should have been placed in a very embarrassing position.

“Yes,” continued Rose, unflinchingly, “and for this reason, you can dispense with a further examination of the apartment. The lady you are seeking is not here. I do not know who you are, but my reason for concealing myself, when you rang, was that I have my reputation to guard, and I did not wish any of Monsieur de Saint-Briac’s friends to see me. I was about to make my escape through the window, when I heard your violent language through the partition, and thought it best for me to remain. It cost me much to show myself, but now that you have seen me, you will cease to accuse an innocent woman because she has the misfortune to resemble me when seen from a distance; and as I am sure that I am addressing an honorable man, I feel certain that you will have forgotten that you ever saw me here if we should chance to meet again.”

Upon the conclusion of this little speech, which would certainly have done honor to a thorough woman of the

world, the daughter of the ex-keeper made a rather haughty little bow to M. de Malverne, and turned toward the door, first, however, extending her hand to the captain, who imprinted a grateful kiss upon it.

Jacques, left alone with the magistrate, turned to him, and said gently:

“Well, are you still angry with me, or do you at last comprehend that you have suspected your wife and your friend without cause?”

Hugh threw his arms around his friend, and the captain submitted to the embrace he so little deserved. When a man takes the first step in the path of deception, he must follow it to the end.

“Forgive me,” murmured M. de Malverne. “That infamous letter drove me nearly mad.”

“Is it possible that you have not guessed who sent it?”

“I can not guess, even now.”

“Have you forgotten the conversation we had with Pancorbo, at the club?”

“What, can it be that—”

“Don’t you recollect that after exchanging a few commonplace remarks with me, he suddenly announced that he had seen me crossing the square in front of the church of Notre Dame in the custody of two policemen the afternoon before? Do you not recollect that an idea that this man, who seemed to be so well informed, was perhaps the assassin, occurred to you?”

“That is true,” murmured M. de Malverne. “I even remember that this announcement had very much the effect of a disguised threat.”

“And you were quite right,” rejoined the captain. “It was intended as a sort of warning. It was equivalent to saying to us: ‘Drop the affair, or I will make you suffer for your interference.’ Now he has concocted a new plot, or rather he has perfected the other.

“He knows that you are a married man; that I am your most intimate friend, and that your wife is young and pretty, so he said to himself: ‘If I can make the judge of instruction believe that this Saint-Briac is Madame de Malverne’s lover, the gentlemen will perhaps kill each other, and I shall be rid of my most dangerous enemies.’ This is exactly what seemed likely to happen when I refused to take you into the presence of the lady I had concealed in

the adjoining room; and the only thing that prevented the catastrophe was the rare tact and courage she displayed in showing herself—a courage and tact particularly commendable.”

“Is she a married lady?”

“You must excuse me from answering that question.”

“But there is certainly nothing to prevent you from telling me if she is the lady who ascended the tower of Notre Dame with you.”

“You are at liberty to believe whatever you please.”

“Then you refuse to answer that question?”

“Absolutely, and I am surprised that you insist. We are not in your office at the palace, and here, you are no longer a judge of instruction, but Hugh de Malverne, my old friend; and now that you can no longer suspect me of having wronged you, I tell you plainly that my love affairs do not concern you in the least.”

“You are right,” exclaimed Malverne, evidently impressed by this clear and straightforward language.

“Now, would you like to examine every nook and corner of my establishment?” inquired the captain, smiling.

“I would not so insult you. I no longer doubt you, and I beg that you will forget what has passed here. I shall preserve the recollection of it as a lesson, but I shall never speak of it to you, and Odette will always remain in ignorance of it.”

“Ah, you are yourself once more, and I trust that nothing will ever occur to mar our old friendship. Will you allow me to give you a word of advice? It is to allow Monsieur de Pancorbo to go and get hung elsewhere.”

“I can not promise that,” was the quick rejoinder. “I am a magistrate, and I must do my duty to the uttermost. But I advise you to have nothing more to do with the affair. It has cost you enough already, and you are under no obligations to investigate it.”

“You need have no fears. I shall have nothing more to do with it. You are going home, now, I presume. When shall I see you again?”

“Whenever you like. Our house is always open to you, you know.”

They shook hands, and separated, but Hugh de Malverne was certainly not the more unfortunate of the two, for

Saint-Briac on being left alone, threw himself into an arm-chair, and exclaimed, with a gesture of despair:

“ Ah, this is too horrible! I loathe myself. I wish that assassin would challenge me to mortal combat and so relieve me of the burden of life.”

CHAPTER VIII.

ROSE VERDIERE left the captain's house with a heavy heart. She did not regret the generous impulse that had prompted her to sacrifice herself, but she scarcely dared to contemplate the possible consequences of her devotion, nor did she know the name of the man she had helped to deceive, though she had heard nearly all of the conversation through the partition wall.

Certain remarks made in the course of this conversation might have given her a clew, but these had escaped her because she happened to be assisting Mme. de Malverne to escape through the window at the time they were uttered. She was, consequently, ignorant that this husband was the magistrate to whom the investigation of the tragedy of Notre Dame had been intrusted; but she knew that he was an intimate friend of the captain, and that was enough to make her dread the consequence of this adventure.

But there was no time to reflect upon all these matters.

She must think now of the child they intended to suppress, to use their own frightful language. She had felt it her first duty to hasten to the aid of Saint-Briac, for Sacha, well guarded by Meriadec, could wait; and yet, she was by no means tranquil in mind. The two villains whose conversation she had overheard, had just shown her what they could do, and it was certainly more difficult to prepare the trap on the Avenue d'Antin, than to effect an entrance into an isolated house on the Rue Cassette.

On leaving the captain's, she walked straight toward the Seine. On the quay, she found the carriage she had left there still waiting for her, and ordered the coachman to drive her to the Rue Cassette with all possible speed. As the horse happened to be a good one, she reached the Rue de Rennes in less than twenty minutes. There she alighted and dismissed the vehicle, not wishing to attract the at-

tention of Meriadec's quiet neighbors by the sound of carriage wheels.

The house in which Rose Verdiere had lived for two days, and which she already began to love, wore its accustomed aspect.

Screened from the street by a long wall, only two windows were visible on approaching the house from the Rue de Rennes.

The first was that of Rose's own room. She had closed this before going out, and was consequently a little surprised to see that it was open. The other, which was in the baron's chamber, was tightly closed, though the weather was superb, and Meriadec was a great lover of fresh air.

"That is very strange," she thought, noticing this twofold change.

All her former misgivings returned, and it was with a wildly throbbing heart that she approached the door. She had no key, and she was afraid she would find the door locked, but she had only to turn the knob to enter.

"I am foolish to worry," she thought. "If the baron had gone out with Sacha, he would not have left his house at the mercy of the first comer, especially as his servant is never here at this hour."

After ascending the stairs, she entered the room where she had breakfasted, but seeing no one, she passed into the adjoining room where she had left Meriadec explaining the pictures to Sacha. The book was lying there open, but master and pupil had both disappeared.

Rose next repaired to her bedroom, which she found deserted; then, again retracing her steps, she hastened to her work-room. Not a soul was visible. Meriadec must have gone out; and his absence, after all, was not so very extraordinary, for he often paid a visit to the garden of the Luxembourg of an afternoon.

"He must have taken Sacha with him," the girl said to herself. "I am sure that he will not lose him on the way; but for all that, I should be glad to see them safe at home again."

She comforted herself with the thought that they would soon return; and while waiting for them, she could think of nothing better to do than to resume her work.

Having received another pressing order from the establishment on the Rue de Rivoli, she had no time to lose if

she would finish the work within the specified time, so she took out her materials and began the garland of forget-me-nots that formed a part of the parure confided to her skill. But unfortunately her thoughts were elsewhere, and she performed her work but indifferently well. The exciting events of the day engrossed her, and her mind was busy with the possible consequences of them.

Absorbed in these reflections, she had made but little progress in her wreath when, glancing up from her work, she saw Meriadec cross the court-yard and ascend the steps leading to his rooms.

“Thank Heaven! he has brought Sacha safely home again!” she exclaimed, springing up.

She had not seen the child; but she supposed he had entered the house in advance of the baron, and that she would find him in the library.

She accordingly hastened there, but saw no one but Meriadec, who exclaimed:

“What, mademoiselle, you are here?”

“I returned home about a quarter of an hour ago,” replied the girl, with some embarrassment. “I stayed out too late, I know, but it was not my fault, and—”

“Oh, I am not blaming you. As you are here, all is well; but I was very much afraid I should never see you again.”

“And why?”

“Why, because I did not meet you at the place indicated. I hastened to the garden of the Tuileries, but you had gone.”

“To the garden of the Tuileries? Why, I have not been there.”

“You certainly wrote me that you were waiting for me there.”

“I did?”

“Most assuredly. See for yourself.”

Meriadec drew a letter from his pocket, and handed it to her; but as soon as she glanced at it, she exclaimed:

“This letter is not from me.”

“What is that you say?”

“The truth. I wonder how you could have supposed so. Who gave it to you?”

A man dressed in the uniform of a commissionaire. He

told me that the matter was urgent, and that the person was even then waiting for me.”

“It is still another conspiracy,” murmured Rose, appalled by this new discovery. “The scoundrel who sent you this forged letter was probably aware that you did not know my handwriting, and so invented this means of getting you away from home.”

“But what could have been his object?”

“Where is Sacha?” inquired the girl, abruptly.

“Sacha is here,” replied Meriadec. “I could not take him with me, of course. I thought you were in danger, and I did not wish to expose the child to peril.”

“And you left him alone in the house?” exclaimed Rose.

“He didn’t know it; and I took good care to lock him in so he could not wander out, even if he wished to do so.”

“Where did you put him?”

“In his own room; and he knew nothing at all about it. After looking at the books with me he felt sleepy, and I laid him upon his bed, when he immediately fell asleep. About a quarter of an hour afterward the commissionaire brought me the letter I just showed you. I sent him away, then, not caring to leave Sacha to the mercy of any one who might happen in. I turned the key in each of the doors of his room. He did not hear me, for he had fallen into such a sound sleep that he has not woke yet.”

“Are you sure?”

“No, not sure; for I have not been in his room; but I feel quite certain of it. We will see for ourselves, however,” he added.

“Look!” cried Rose, suddenly dragging him to the window, and pointing to a rope ladder that was swinging from the window of Sacha’s room.

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Meriadec, in profound consternation. “The child has run away.”

“Say, rather, he has been stolen. Where could he have procured a rope ladder?”

“I don’t know; but I am sure that he was not taken away against his will. He could have struggled and shouted for help. You can not carry off a boy eight or nine years old as a nurse would carry off a baby.”

“Oh, they took good care not to employ violence. They

resorted to strategy, and doubtless persuaded him that one of us had sent for him."

"Sacha would hardly believe that."

"But you believed the same thing; nor are you the only person who has been similarly victimized to-day? Besides, nothing could have pleased Sacha better than to get a chance to see the city. He probably told them that he was a prisoner in his room. They threw him this ladder, and he lost no time in using it, if only to get even with you for locking him up without his knowledge."

"Yes," murmured Meriadec, "I think it must have happened in that way, unless—"

Without concluding the sentence, he hastened to the communicating door. The key was still in the lock. He turned it softly, and stole in on tiptoe. Rose followed.

The bed, a small iron bed, the curtains of which were closely drawn, stood at the further end of the room. Meriadec noiselessly parted the curtains, placed his finger on his lips, and beckoned the Angel of the Bells to approach. The child was lying asleep on his right side, with his face turned toward the wall, and his left arm over his face. He did not make the slightest movement; and Meriadec whispered to his companion, "Don't wake him; he is sleeping so soundly."

They left the apartment as cautiously as they had entered it, and seated themselves at the further end of the work-room so they might be able to talk without disturbing the child.

"How profound his slumber seems to be!" said the young girl, only partially reassured.

"It is the slumber we, too, enjoyed at his age," replied the baron, rubbing his hands. "You see, my dear Rose, that you were needlessly alarmed."

"I admit it; and yet, why is the window open?"

"I opened it at Sacha's request. He was too warm; and the room is so small I thought it best to give him a little fresh air."

"But the ladder?"

"I did not put that there, I must admit."

"Who could have done it, then?"

"I really can not say. Perhaps the boy can tell us when he wakes. It doesn't matter much, since he is safe and well. Perhaps it was our friend Fabreguette. He did not

call this morning, according to promise, but he may have dropped in this afternoon, and finding no one at home, took into his head to scale the boy's window, and have a romp with him."

"That seems scarcely probable."

In fact, Rose seemed to be so far from convinced by this reasoning, that Meriadec tried a new argument.

"You must admit that if the ladder was brought here by an enemy, he would not have been very likely to leave it here to mark his passage?"

"That is true," murmured the girl. "Still, I can't help feeling uneasy about Sacha."

"What, now, after you have seen him?"

"I shall not feel really comfortable until Sacha tells me that all is right with his own lips."

"And that shall be as soon as you please, mademoiselle. I was unwilling to disturb him just now; but he has slept long enough, after all; besides, I am anxious to inquire what occurred here during my absence. It is more than likely that he knows nothing at all about it. Still, let us go and wake him."

Rose eagerly acquiesced; and they returned to the boy's chamber, where they found everything exactly as they had left it. Sacha was lying in the same position; but this time Meriadec pulled back the curtains noisily, and called him by name.

Receiving no reply, he leaned over and took hold of the hand that hid his face. It was so icy cold that he hastened to lift the child; but Sacha gave no sign of life. His half-open eyes wore a vacant stare, and his distorted face, with his tongue hanging out of his mouth, was unrecognizable.

"He is dead!" sobbed Rose.

"Murdered, rather!" exclaimed Meriadec, letting the boy's head drop back upon the pillow.

It was a pitiful sight. Upon the lad's fair, uncovered throat were two purple marks, imprints of the cruel fingers which had ended his young life almost in an instant. The deed must have been committed while the boy was asleep, for his clothing was not disordered, nor the bed tumbled. The assassin was only obliged to place the body in a natural position and lay the arm across his face to give his victim the appearance of being asleep.

Rose wept silently. Meriadek was overcome with consternation.

"It was I who killed him!" he said, smiting his breast. "I ought to have watched over him; and I left him unprotected."

"To hasten to my assistance," sobbed Rose. "It is I who am the cause of his death."

"You could not have foreseen that the murderer would make use of your name to lure me from home."

"No; but I knew that his life was in danger. I heard two men talk of kidnapping him, and instead of hastening home, I—"

"It is very fortunate that you did not return. You would have been here alone, and the wretches might have killed you too."

"I would gladly have sacrificed my life to save his."

"We will avenge him."

"Do not hope to do that. We are no match for these villains. We shall all perish."

"No; for we have right and the law on our side. I wished to take the place of the authorities in this matter. I regret it deeply now; and I shall tell the judge of instruction all I have heretofore kept from him. Now Sacha is dead, I have no further excuse for concealment; and there is not a minute to lose. A murder has been committed in my house; and this murder is only a sequel to the tragedy of Notre Dame. I am going to the Palais de Justice at once."

"I can not remain here alone," said Rose, casting a shuddering glance at the form of her little charge.

"Why do you not accompany me? You, too, were mixed up in the tower affair, and will soon be summoned as a witness. Suppose that we do not wait for the judge to send for us. If our friends were here, I should urge them to go with us, but unfortunately Fabreguette has not made his appearance to-day."

"They have killed him too, perhaps; but we shall find Monsieur Daubrac at the hospital."

"Yes, this is the hour for his second round of visits; and the hospital is right on our way. Let us go at once, mademoiselle."

"But who will watch over him?" asked Rose, pointing to poor little Sacha.

Meriadec's only reply was a gesture that signified plainly: "He has no longer any need of human care."

Rose took from her bosom a tiny bunch of violets that she had purchased on her way to the Rue de Rivoli, placed it gently upon the child's breast, and knelt reverently by the bedside.

While she was engaged in prayer, Meriadec closed the window without removing the ladder, which he left so that the detectives could see how the murderer had effected an entrance; then he assisted Rose to her feet and led her from the room, locking the door carefully, and putting the key in his pocket.

"Will you tell the magistrate all you know about the affair?" he inquired of his *protégée*.

Rose's only reply was a silent nod. She felt an unwillingness to give a direct answer in words, for the promise was not made without an inward reservation. She was firmly resolved to say nothing to the judge about the scene between Saint-Briac and the husband; nor had she said a word about it to Meriadec, for she did not wish to break the promise of secrecy she had made to the captain. Besides, the scene was only indirectly connected with the tragedy of Notre Dame, and had no connection whatever with Sacha's murder.

"I hope we shall find the magistrate in his office," continued Meriadec; "but we haven't a minute to lose."

They hurried down-stairs; and this time the baron carefully locked the street door, a precaution which he had neglected when he hastened to the Tuileries in search of Rose. Stopping a carriage which was passing along the Rue de Rennes, they entered it, and were driven rapidly to the hospital.

Meriadec found Daubrac in the surgeon's room, and after briefly relating the particulars of Sacha's death, invited him to accompany them to the Palace of Justice.

"I will, most assuredly; but I doubt very much if Mademoiselle Verdier will go when she hears the sad news I have to communicate to her. Her father is dead."

"It really seems as if everybody was dying!" exclaimed Meriadec, gloomily.

"It does, indeed. I begin to think that we are all doomed. I have just come from Fabreguette's house. He has not returned to his garret on the Rue de la Huchette,

and nothing has been seen of him for thirty-six hours. Some misfortune has certainly befallen him. As for Verdiere, he just had another stroke of paralysis which took him off instantly, without even giving him time to say good-bye."

"Ah, well, if you will take my advice, you will say nothing to his daughter about it at present. She would be overcome with grief, and refuse to go with us; and I am anxious to terminate this most intolerable state of affairs without delay. To do that it is necessary for all three of us to appear together before the magistrate. If I go alone, my testimony will have much less weight. He would scarcely believe me upon oath if I should tell him how and why I found and protected Sacha."

"I agree with you fully; especially as this murder of Sacha will infallibly bring the police and the other officers of the law to your house. We can not leave you to meet the storm alone. I even regret the absence of Fabreguette; but we can not spare the time to hunt him up. After all, there will be three of us, for I will defer telling poor Mademoiselle Verdiere that she is an orphan. She will learn the sad truth soon enough."

When Daubrac entered the carriage in which Rose was seated, he did not find himself obliged to tell her a falsehood in regard to her father's condition, for in her grief and excitement, she quite forgot to inquire about her parent; besides, the palace was only a short distance off, and they had very little chance for conversation.

On their arrival, Meriadec alighted to make the necessary inquiries, and learned that M. de Malverne had left his office between two and three o'clock, and that he had probably returned home.

After another consultation with Daubrac and Rose Verdiere, it was unanimously decided that they should go straight to the Faubourg Saint-Honore, where the magistrate resided, neither member of the party foreseeing in the least the inevitable consequence of the intended visit.

CHAPTER IX.

FOR two days neither Meriadec, Rose, Daubrac, nor the captain had been on a bed of roses, but Jean Fabreguette, their ally, was spending his time much more uncomforta-

bly. He had been a close prisoner for more than twenty-four hours; his hunger was making itself keenly felt, and he was about to explore his dungeon for the twentieth time, when he fancied that he heard measured footsteps on the other side of the partition. It was by no means probable that release was at hand, but it was by no means impossible that some one had come to kill him, and he instinctively assumed the attitude of defense.

The sounds became more and more distinct. The steps approached the partition, and Fabreguette opened the pocket knife, which was his only weapon of defense, but a very frail one.

Dazzled by a sudden gleam of light, he hastily recoiled, involuntarily closing his eyes, and when he opened them again, he beheld, in the opening, the odious face of his persecutor, distinctly visible in the light of two candles, which the scoundrel had placed upon a table. The sight revived the prisoner's wrath, and he proceeded to apostrophize his tormentor in a very vigorous fashion.

"What has brought you here, you vile scoundrel?" he cried, hotly.

"I came to see if you were not dead," was the sneering reply.

"Not yet, you miserable hound!"

"You soon will be, unless you consent to listen to reason."

"That is to say unless I will consent to betray the child into your hands?"

"Oh, I am not particular about that now. I have found an easy and very effectual way of getting rid of him. But I will stick to my bargain, nevertheless, for if you will write the letter I propose to dictate to you, you will assist me very considerably, and I will pay you the amount agreed upon: ten thousand francs."

"Go to the devil, you old wretch!"

"Go to the devil! You will get there in advance of me, if you persist in your obstinacy. It is your own affair, however, and you are at perfect liberty to starve if you like. Only remember, when your last hour comes, that I offered to save you. This thought will not sweeten your last moments, and I have always heard that one's sufferings were frightful when one dies of starvation."

“I much prefer that death to the one which awaits you upon the Place de la Roquette.”

“Oh, you will not have the satisfaction of sending me to the gallows. You can rest assured of that, for by to-morrow, my master and myself will have left the inhospitable shores of France forever, first putting your little *protégé*, Sacha, neatly out of the way, however. That little job will be attended to this evening.”

“This evening,” murmured Fabreguette in utter consternation.

“Yes, all the necessary arrangements have been made, and before night, he will have rejoined his mother in a better world. When he is safely out of the way, we shall have no further use for you, consequently, this will be my last visit.”

“I hope so, for I care much less about living than about killing you; and I shall never be able to strangle you through that little opening. You are too much of a coward to come any nearer.”

“One doesn’t go near a mad dog, and I should be a fool, indeed, not to keep at a distance. But I now warn you that I shall never set foot in this house again. I am going this very minute to securely fasten every door and window. I shall take the keys away with me, and as my master has leased the house for a year, no one will enter it before the expiration of that time. Consequently, no one will know what has become of you; and, when the owner resumes possession of his property, there will be nothing left of you but your bones.”

A sudden fit of coughing interrupted this pleasant conversation, for a puff of smoke savagely driven through the opening by Fabreguette went straight down the throat of the marquis’s auxiliary, and he found it difficult to regain his breath.

“What! you are smoking!” he gasped.

“Yes. Had I known that the smell of my pipe would be disagreeable to you, nothing could have induced me to indulge.”

“Where did you obtain a light?”

“I always carry a steel in my pocket.”

“Nothing but a steel?”

“I have a flint and tinder box also.”

“No matches?”

"No; they cost too much, and never light. The manufacturers are all in league to cheat the poor. But what difference can it make to you whether I have any matches or not?"

"If you had, you might set fire to the house."

"What of that? It is insured probably."

"Oh, I care nothing whatever about the house, but the interior of it is finished in pine, and in case it took fire, you would be burned alive in less than no time. You are in the middle of a house which I am going to close up securely before I leave it, and no matter how much you may shriek for help, no one will come to your assistance."

"Pooh! it matters very little whether one starves to death or is roasted alive. I even think I should prefer being roasted. But I am deeply touched to learn that you take such an interest in my fate," added Fabreguette, ironically.

"You are very much mistaken. If you won't consent to do what I ask, you can starve as soon as you please. But I have said all I have to say to you. There is nothing more to keep me here, and the marquis is waiting for my assistance on the Rue Cassette. It is nearly noon, and I have no time to waste in idle talk. I ask you once more, will you write the letter? I have brought writing materials. You do not answer. For the second, and last time, I ask you. You say nothing. Very well, so be it," concluded the scoundrel, suddenly closing the aperture.

Jean Fabreguette again found himself in utter darkness. We must do him the justice to say that he had not been tempted for an instant to accept the offers of the scoundrel who had given him a chance to save his life at the cost of an act of infamous treachery; nevertheless, he knew that this decision was final, and that the auxiliary of the Countess Xenia's murderer would not return again. The manner in which he had just spoken left no possible doubt of his intentions. But a remark that he had just made started a new idea in Fabreguette's busy brain.

"Why did he allude to the danger of fire?" wondered the artist. "Certainly not out of solicitude for my welfare. Is it because he fears I may resort to that means of escape. When the cage takes fire, the bird escapes; that is, unless he is roasted alive. It is a chance, and the only one I have left, and I have a great mind to try it."

It was much easier to make this plan than to carry it into execution, however. A house does not catch fire like a pile of shavings, particularly when one has only a box of matches to kindle it with, and even if one should succeed in setting fire to it, one runs a great risk of perishing in the flames. But our friend of the Rue de la Huchette was not easily daunted.

He drew from his pocket the box of matches which he had just denied having, for the first thing to be done was to examine the interior of his cell, of which he had as yet gained only a very imperfect idea, merely from the sense of touch.

He took one match from the box with infinite care, and passing a finger gently over the sulphur-tipped end, he saw that it emitted a faint bluish light. This was a good sign, for his only chance of life depended upon the condition in which he found these matches.

"Heaven grant that they are not damp," he said to himself. "If they are, I believe I will scrape off the phosphorus and poison myself. That would certainly be much better than to die of starvation, for it would be over so much sooner."

After examining the rough side of his match box, and satisfying himself that it was dry, he made the momentous experiment. It proved successful.

Armed with this feeble light, he proceeded to explore his dungeon. By the time he had used three matches he had examined only two sides of it, and had discovered nothing. The question he asked himself now, was how many more feet he would be obliged to traverse to complete his tour of inspection, and how many matches remained in his box. The further he advanced, the more doubtful his ultimate success appeared, but his perseverance was about to be rewarded.

When his tour of exploration was nearly concluded, he discovered upon the floor, a couple of feet from the wall, a small pile of pine shavings which the carpenters had neglected to remove. There was enough to make a bright blaze, but a short-lived blaze, however bright, would hardly set fire to the heavy timbers about it; so his new-found treasure was not likely to prove as valuable as he at first supposed.

Fabreguette separated the shavings with his foot, taking

care not to set fire to them with the match that served him as a torch, and he had scarcely done so, when he uttered a cry of joy, for beneath the shavings, was a tiny stove and a little pile of charcoal.

Who could have left it there? Probably the workmen employed in the construction of this sort of dungeon made in the center of the house by the order of the tenant. They had doubtless used it for drying the paint, and forgotten it, when their work was done.

Misfortunes never come singly, it is said, and the same is true of bits of good fortune, at least, in this case, for Fabreguette perceived in a corner not two feet from the shavings, a white object, which on examination proved to be a package of candles, more precious to him, at that moment, than a nugget of gold.

“Saved!” he cried, pressing the package to his heart. “I have all I need to burn this sorcerer’s castle! It is a pity that the scoundrel who imprisoned me here has left the house. It would fill my heart with joy if I could only fasten him up, and leave him here to be roasted alive.”

He possessed all the necessary materials now, and he resolved to begin operations without a moment’s delay, for the task might prove a tedious one; and he did not forget his tormentor’s boast, that Sacha would be put out of the way before night.

He began by lighting one of the six candles he had just secured, and armed with this luminary, he resumed his examination of his prison; but the slide through which the jailer had taunted him, and the door, seemed no more susceptible to the action of fire than any other portions of the wood-work. He next proceeded to kindle a fire in the tiny stove, fanning it into a brisk blaze with his red cap instead of a bellows. This was only the work of a moment, and he next turned his attention to one of the joints of the wood-work, and began to scrape away vigorously at the edges with his pocket-knife—a hard job, particularly at the beginning. The hard wood resisted the frail blade, but he finally succeeded in making an opening to which he applied the flame of his second candle. This flame soon charred the roughened wood, and the hole increased a little in size.

It was only a beginning, but the means had been found. By digging off the charred portions of the woodwork, and reapplying his candle, the hole finally became large enough

for him to introduce into it one of the pieces of burning charcoal from the stove.

It was slow work, and fully an hour elapsed before he succeeded in burning a hole entirely through the partition. Resolved now to employ more effectual measures, he pushed the stove close up to the hole already made, piled all his little stock of charcoal and shavings upon it, and awaited the result.

A dense smoke soon pervaded the little room, forked tongues of flame licked the wood-work, which now blazed and crackled as merrily as if it had been soaked in petroleum. Fabreguette was jubilant, but his feelings speedily underwent a change. The fire was increasing rapidly, but the smoke increased correspondingly, an acrid smoke that filled the prisoner's throat, and made it well nigh impossible for him to breathe. A few moments more and he would certainly die of suffocation.

He took refuge at the end of the room, as far as possible from the fire, but it was very evident that all four sides of his dungeon would soon be in flames, and his situation was even now almost intolerable.

The poor artist began to realize that he had gone rather too far, and that the gloomy prediction of his tormentors was likely to come to pass.

In destroying his prison, the prisoner was going to destroy himself. But he could not make up his mind to perish thus, and he made a final resolve.

The fire was besieging him, he would turn upon the fire so, placing his crossed arms in front of his face to protect it, and closing his eyes, he suddenly dashed with all his might against the partition.

Fortunately the fire had so weakened it, that it yielded to the shock, and Fabreguette fell through to the other side, in the midst of a shower of live coals, and pursued the hungry flames, which the air had quickened. He had little difficulty in regaining his feet, and when he succeeded his clothing was burned and scorched in many places.

He must now lose no time in escaping from this house which would speedily be converted into a fiery furnace, and after rushing through the adjoining rooms, he flew down the stairs, and tried to open the street door; but the man in black had locked it securely on the outside when he

the house, and Fabreguette must find some other way of escape, or perish.

Gathering up all his courage, he rushed upstairs again, and entered the front room, which was already filled with smoke. The other two were already on fire, and the light from the flames illuminated every nook and corner of the adjoining apartment.

The windows were closed, and the shutters also. These last were fastened by a hook, which the artist succeeded in wrenching off, but they did not yield to his attempt to open them, and Fabreguette soon discovered that they were firmly nailed up. This time, his heart would have failed him, had he not noticed a pair of andirons in the fire-place. He seized one and used it as a battering-ram to burst open the shutters, which finally gave way under the violence of his repeated blows.

To his unspeakable joy, he beheld the light of day once more, and perceived that the window was not more than nine feet from the pavement, a trifling jump for a stalwart youth; and, climbing outside the window sill, he allowed himself to drop gently from it to the ground below.

Clouds of smoke were by this time pouring from the window, and Fabreguette, who had not lost his presence of mind, shouted "Fire! Fire!" at the top of his lungs, then started off down the street, in order to avoid passing the shop of his friend, the carriage-maker, who might stop him.

Fabreguette felt no desire to relate his adventures at present. He was anxious to reach Meriadec's house as quick as possible, and he knew if he lingered about the burning dwelling he would probably be accused of setting fire to it, and be dragged off to the station house.

The Rue de Marbeuf terminates in the Avenue de l'Alma, and on reaching that, he sprang into a passing omnibus that would take him by the corner of the Rue Taranne, which was only about two hundred yards from the baron's residence.

When he reached Meriadec's house, he was not a little surprised to find the gate locked, for usually one only had to turn the knob to gain an entrance. He rang several times, but the summons remained unanswered.

Was this a good sign? Yes, if Meriadec had gone out with Rose and Sacha; and yet the baron's servant ought to

be there. While he was trying to decide upon the probable cause of this silence, a harsh voice cried:

“There isn’t anybody at home.”

Turning, Fabreguette saw on the other side of the street a cobbler, sitting in a tiny shop not much larger than a dog-kennel.

“The tall, thin man has gone out with the pretty girl,” continued the old cobbler.

“How long ago?” inquired Fabreguette, crossing the street.

“About an hour and a half.”

“The child went with them, I suppose.”

“No. I didn’t see him.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course I am. I’m not blind; and I know all the people who live there, and the people that visit them.”

“Then you know me, I suppose?”

“Slightly. You haven’t visited the master long; but you dropped in about breakfast-time pretty steadily for a while. I was wondering only a little while ago why you hadn’t been around since day before yesterday.”

Fabreguette, though not in a very cheerful mood, could not help laughing at this follower of St. Crispin; and the idea that he might obtain some information from this source occurred to him.

“As you are in your shop from morning until night, perhaps you can tell whether your neighbor has had any other visitors to-day,” he ventured.

“His friend took breakfast with him—the dark-complexioned fellow that stays at the hospital. He came back with the pretty blonde who went out very early in the morning. He went away again about two o’clock, and the girl about twenty minutes afterward. Finally, the baron went out, too. Tell me, is he really a baron?”

“Yes, as truly as you are alive.”

“He don’t look like it. A baron ought to be fat.”

“Did he go without taking the child?”

“Yes, and without locking the gate; for a fellow I never saw before walked in afterward without saying so much as by your leave. The child was alone in the house, and this fellow remained with him only about a quarter of an hour; but the others have been going and coming all the afternoon. The blonde returned first; then the baron came

back. He seemed to have been running, for he was all out of breath; but in a few moments out he came again with the pretty girl, and they tore off as if they were almost crazy. But this time the baron locked the gate."

"It's very strange," murmured Fabreguette, by no means reassured by this account.

"I don't know what has been going on there for the past three or four days; but I'm willing to bet a quart bottle of wine that the police have been watching the house. I've seen a detective twice hanging about in the alley at the side of my shop, and I am almost sure that he followed you day before yesterday, when you left with the young doctor."

Fabreguette knew what to think on that point, and he became still more uneasy in regard to Sacha.

"Here comes the servant now!" exclaimed the cobbler suddenly. "She will open the gate for you."

A woman had, in fact, come up the street unperceived by our friend, and was even now putting her key in the lock. Fabreguette ran over, told her who he was, and stepped into the court-yard with her.

But he had hardly set foot in it, when he perceived the rope ladder dangling from Sacha's window. To run to it, climb it, tear open the shutters, and leap in at the window was only the work of an instant, while the stupefied servant, who stood gazing at him from below, really believed that he had gone mad.

In fact, she was so overcome with astonishment that she entirely forgot to close the gate behind her.

A moment had scarcely elapsed when Fabreguette reappeared at the window, shouting madly:

"He is dead! They have killed him!" And he began to come down the same way he had gone up, without noticing that the woman had darted into the street shrieking:

"Help! murder! murder!"

The cobbler gave one bound out of his shop; but he could not suspect Fabreguette, who had just left him. It chanced, however, that the two policemen, who were making their round, reached the house just as the woman screamed for help. Rushing into the court-yard, and seeing a man coming down a rope ladder, they ran to him and collared him before he had set foot on the ground. He struggled to free himself, but they would not relax their

hold, nor would they listen when he tried to explain, but only cried:

“To the station-house with him!”

These words completed the exasperation of Fabreguette, who retorted:

“Yes, take me, not to the station-house, but to the office of a commissioner of police. I have something to tell him about the tragedy of Notre Dame, as well as the crime that has just been committed here.”

And he added mentally:

“Meriadec may do as he likes; but I have kept silence long enough.”

CHAPTER X.

AFTER his stormy interview with Jacques de Saint-Briac, M. de Malverne went straight home. He was still in a state of great excitement, and not yet entirely convinced of his wife's innocence.

He was anxious to see Odette again, and satisfy himself with his own eyes that she was at home.

He found her there, doing the honors of her drawing-room to a few particular friends as usual.

She received her husband in her wonted manner, reproached him gently for being late, and poured out a cup of tea for him with her own white hands. But all her attentions and sweetness failed to dispel the cloud that darkened her husband's face; and his evident depression of spirits cast a chill over the little circle, and the conversation gradually flagged.

But an unforeseen interruption soon put an end to a situation that was becoming embarrassing to all present.

M. de Malverne's valet entered the drawing-room, stepped up to his master, and said a few words in a low tone, whereupon that gentleman rose.

“Business matters pursue me even here,” he remarked coldly. “Some witnesses who could not find me at the palace, send me word that they have brought some very important information. I can not defer seeing them, so I must ask these ladies to kindly excuse me, and you, too, my dear.”

No one protested against this abrupt departure, not even Mme. de Malverne; and the judge bowed, and left the

room, preceded by the servant, who seemed considerably surprised at his master's words and manner.

A servant who has lived a long while with a family has a pretty correct idea of what is going on in the household, even if he is not particularly shrewd; and this man was perfectly satisfied that a crisis was at hand.

This fact was so apparent from the expression of his face, that M. de Malverne might have questioned him; but his twofold character of a magistrate and a gentleman prevented him from stooping to extort information from such a source.

"I am going to my study," he said to him. "You will remain in the room where you took the witnesses, and I will ring when I am ready to see them. How many are there?"

"Three, sir."

"And one of them told you that his name was Meriadec?"

"The Baron Meriadec; yes, sir."

"Very well. You can show him in when I ring."

M. de Malverne, once more transformed into the judge of instruction, intended to proceed exactly as he would have done at the palace. Seating himself in a comfortable arm-chair, he prepared himself to listen to this M. de Meriadec, whom he had not yet seen, but whom he had expected to examine on the morrow.

After reflecting a few moments on the new situation, M. de Malverne rang, and the well-trained valet promptly ushered in our friend Meriadec. The magistrate pointed out the chair the visitor was expected to occupy, and was about to ask him the nature of his business, but the baron did not give him time to do so.

"Sir," he began excitedly, "I have not the honor of being known to you; but I assure you—and I can easily prove the truth of my words—that my life has been irreproachable."

"I am perfectly well aware of the fact," replied M. de Malverne, courteously.

"Ah, well, I have come here to confess a grave fault—a fault that has been terrible in its consequences."

The judge was not prepared for such a beginning, and he gazed at the baron with an expression that was more astonished than severe.

"I have concealed from the authorities a fact that I

should have made known to them without a moment's delay," continued the baron; "and the fact is this: After the arrest of Monsieur de Saint-Briac, whom I did not believe guilty, I returned to the tower of Notre Dame alone, thinking that the real culprit might have remained there."

"And you found him?" asked M. de Malverne, eagerly.

"No, sir; he had had time to escape by the church roof; but I did find a child he had deserted after killing the mother."

"What are you saying?"

"The truth, sir. I should have brought this child to you at once; and I did, in fact, take him to the palace the next day. But at the door I met Monsieur de Saint-Briac, who had just been set at liberty, and whose innocence I was no longer under any obligation to prove. Then I asked myself what the police would be likely to do with a little waif of nine years, who did not know his parents' name, and who had arrived from the heart of Russia only the night before; and I finally made up my mind that I would keep the boy, and ferret out his mother's murderer with the assistance of a couple of friends."

"A strange idea, that! You must know that no person has a right to usurp the place of the legal authorities in such matters. Your conduct has been most unjustifiable."

"I yielded to a hasty impulse, and I have been cruelly punished."

"The only way of atoning for your fault is to surrender this child to the authorities at once; and I presume you have brought him with you. If not—"

"He is dead. The scoundrel who killed his mother just murdered him in my house."

M. de Malverne sprung up from his arm-chair, and seemed about to ring, probably for the purpose of sending his valet for a couple of policemen. A person who told such a tale as this must be a madman; that is, unless he had committed the murder himself.

Meriadec understood, and begged the judge to hear him to the end. He related Sacha's entire history; told him all that had occurred since he found the child at the foot of the south tower; described the visit to the morgue, the meeting with the murderer there, and finally the circumstances attending the lad's death.

He concluded by imploring the magistrate to examine

Rose Verdiere and Daubrac, who were in the next room, and also to question the captain, who could testify to the truth of the strange statements that had just been made. When the baron ceased speaking, the judge rose, and said coldly:

“I do not doubt your veracity, nor the excellence of your intentions; nevertheless, I must go without delay, and in company with the proper authorities, to the house where the crime was committed. You will accompany me; and I can not promise to set you free after this visit. My ability to do that will depend upon the result of the investigation I am about to make. But first, there are certain points upon which I am anxious for you to enlighten me. You tell me that there is a young girl residing under your roof? How does she happen to be under your protection?”

“She has been residing there only a few days. In consequence of the crime committed upon the tower, her father, who was bell-ringer at Notre Dame, lost his place. On the day following his dismissal, he had a stroke of paralysis, and was taken to the hospital, where he just died. His daughter was left without a shelter, and with no means of support save what she earned by her trade as a maker of artificial flowers. I offered her a part of my house for which I have no use, and she accepted my offer. That is all.”

“Rose Verdiere? This name figures upon the list of witnesses I have summoned for to-morrow.”

“Yes, sir. Will you do me the favor to question her now?”

“Certainly, as it is of the greatest importance that she should tell me how she employed her time from the moment of her departure from the house, until her return. Did she reach the house before you did?”

“Yes, sir. I found her there when I returned; but she had not discovered the child’s body. It was I who opened the door of the room in which he was killed.”

“All these facts remain to be proved,” said the magistrate, dryly.

“Nothing could be easier,” replied Meriadec, surprised and offended at the tone of suspicion in which M. de Malverne had just spoken of the Angel of the Bells.

“You assure me that this young girl’s conduct is above reproach,” continued the judge; “but one can never be

absolutely certain in regard to such matters, nor can you vouch for her past. It looks badly for her that she allowed the assassin to ascend the tower without registering, the day he went there in company with his wife and this child, whose existence we never heard of until now."

"You forget, sir, that Rose was not there when the party went up into the tower. It is her father alone we must blame; and he has been severely punished."

"You defend her very warmly."

"As is only natural, sir. I know Mademoiselle Verdiere well. I esteem and love her, and would gladly marry her if she would have me."

"Permit me to say that your personal sentiments are not to be considered in this matter. You claim that you know her. How long have you been acquainted?"

"Only a short time, it is true; but I know her well enough to understand her character."

"It is, nevertheless, my duty to inquire into her antecedents, and to gain some reliable knowledge of her present life. She is very pretty, I hear, so it is almost certain that she has a lover."

Meriadec made an impetuous gesture; but the judge quietly ignored the protest, and continued, coldly:

"It may be that this lover is in some way connected with the wretches who killed the mother and child—indirectly connected, I trust. I even admit that she may have assisted them in their projects without suspecting it."

"Sir!" exclaimed Meriadec, struggling against his rising anger, "you will soon admit the injustice of these suspicions; and since you compel me to say it, I admit that Mademoiselle Verdiere has a lover, though not of the kind you seem to suppose. You can surely believe me, who love her and who would give all I possess to win her love in return. But I could see that she was pleased with my friend, Albert Daubrac. He is young; I—"

Monsieur Daubrac is a professional man, and belongs to a well-to-do and respectable family; consequently she can not expect that he will marry her; and if he has paid her any marked attentions, it certainly was not with honorable intentions."

"His heart is too noble; and he understands her worth too well to have any but honorable motives. If you doubt what I say, ask him. He is here."

“ I will question him presently, but not in your *protégée’s* presence.”

Meriadec was too deeply grieved and offended to reply. He could not understand the magistrate’s manner, and to tell the truth, Hugh de Malverne would have conducted the case very differently, had he been in his normal condition.

“ Now, tell me about this artist, who has also taken it upon himself to usurp the functions of the legal authorities,” continued the magistrate, without appearing to notice the baron’s scornful silence. “ He has disappeared, you say?”

“ Yes, sir. Nothing has been seen of him for two days.”

“ That means he has not visited your house for that length of time, probably?”

“ He has not only ceased to visit me, but he has not been seen at his own home. Daubrac satisfied himself of that fact this morning.”

“ What conclusion do you draw from his mysterious disappearance?”

“ That he has been enticed somewhere, and killed.”

“ A rather rash conclusion, it seems to me. The artist is a thorough Bohemian, who leads a very irregular life, according to all I hear.”

“ Possibly; but he seems to be an honest fellow, and very kind-hearted. We learned through your friend, the captain, that the house to which Sacha was taken on his arrival in Paris, was probably on the Rue de Marbeuf; and the poor fellow, whose conduct you censure, was going to try to discover the house when he left Daubrac day before yesterday. He probably found it, for he has not returned.”

M. de Malverne started violently when the captain’s name was mentioned, and he now asked abruptly.

“ What part has the captain taken in all this?”

This question seemed very singular to Meriadec, but he did not know how to evade it.

“ Monsieur de Saint-Briac has not taken a prominent part in the affair—not by any means,” he stammered. “ I thought you knew him intimately; and in that case, you must have seen him much oftener than we have, since his mishap the other day.”

“ I saw him when he came to ask me for your address,”

replied M. de Malverne, evasively, "and I gave it to him without knowing why he was so anxious to see you."

"He happened to call at my house one morning when all my friends were assembled there—Daubrac, Fabreguette, Mademoiselle Verdier, and the child of the murdered woman. He began by saying that he had come to talk with us about the Notre Dame affair, and we replied by apologizing for the part we had taken in his arrest. He then asked us for a description of the man whom Sacha recognized at the morgue, and whom we suspected of being the assassin."

"Did you give it?"

"Fabreguette did something better. He showed him a hasty portrait he had drawn of the man, and when Monsieur de Saint-Briac saw it, he exclaimed: 'It is he!' We begged him to explain. He refused for a while, then he told us that the portrait bore a striking resemblance to a member of the club to which he belonged—a Spaniard, or pretended Spaniard."

"The Marquis de Pancorbo?"

"Yes, that was the name, and the captain added that the gentleman was staying at the Continental."

"I know all this. But what followed?" inquired the magistrate, impatiently.

"Afterward, Monsieur de Saint-Briac told us that having followed the pretended marquis one evening, when he left the club house, he found awaiting him, on his return home, an anonymous letter, threatening dire vengeance, if the captain ever meddled with the Spaniard's affairs again. This threat, and certain allusions in the letter proved beyond any possibility of doubt that the writer was the Countess Xenia's murderer."

"With what did he threaten the captain?"

"He threatened to denounce him to the husband of the lady who went up into the tower of Notre Dame with him."

"What conditions did he place upon his silence?"

"I just told you. He demanded that Monsieur de Saint-Briac should cease to interest himself in his affairs."

"Did the captain consent to these conditions?"

"At first he seemed to prefer that we should not deliver the murderer up to justice; but he finally admitted that we must finish our work—that it would be cowardly to give up

the fight just as we had gained the means of conquering our odious enemy. In fact, he felt that he had no right to stop us."

"Did he propose to unite with you in your efforts to bring Monsieur de Pancorbo to justice?"

"No. He promised to allow us to be guided by our own judgment; he even promised to assist us, but only on condition that we should not disclose his connection with us. He even did not want any one to know that he had been to my house. Our interview with Monsieur de Saint-Briac ended in this way. He has not visited me since, nor have any of us laid eyes on him since that day."

"You know his address, I suppose?"

"Yes. He gave it to us so we could write to him, if necessary."

"And you are sure that none of your friends have been there, neither Monsieur Daubrac, nor the missing artist, nor the young lady?"

"Perfectly sure. If any of them had called on him, they certainly would have told me. Why should they desire to conceal the fact? May I venture to add, sir, that I fail to understand the object of all these questions?"

"Confine yourself to answering them, if you please. You seem to forget that you are here in the capacity of a witness."

"I certainly have not forgotten that there is the dead body of an unfortunate child at my house, and that his murderers have not yet been arrested. There is good reason to fear that they never will be if you defer setting the police upon their track."

"Do you presume to teach me my business?" asked the judge, haughtily.

"No, sir," replied Meriadec, coldly. "But if you have no more questions to ask me, I beg that you will allow me to retire. I must guard the body of Sacha until I can find an opportunity to avenge his death."

The judge saw that he had gone too far, so he resumed in a more moderate tone:

"He shall be avenged, I promise you that; and I assure you that my questions are not aimless, by any means. Besides, there are only one or two more questions which I desire to put to you, and I trust that your answers will be frank and to the point."

“Go on, sir.”

“What did you and your friends think of Monsieur de Saint-Briac’s refusal to join you in your efforts to deliver up Pancorbo to justice?”

“We fancied that he was afraid he should bring down an injured husband’s vengeance upon the woman he adored, and that this consideration outweighed all others in his eyes.”

“And you felt no desire to discover the name of this lady whose reputation was so dear to him?”

“No, sir. None of us felt any such desire. It was an honorable man’s secret, and one with which we had nothing, whatever, to do. If Monsieur de Saint-Briac feels that he can confide it to any one, it would certainly be to you, his most intimate friend. But pardon me for repeating that the examination of Monsieur de Saint-Briac is much less urgent than the arrest of the scoundrels who have already committed their second murder.”

“I know it, sir, but though I have finished with you, I have not even begun with your friends. I must give them a hearing now, separately, of course. Will you, therefore, have the goodness to step into the next room where they are waiting, and where you, too, can wait while I question them, and may I ask you to send me, first, the daughter of the former keeper of the tower?”

This request, though politely expressed, was equivalent to an order, and Meriadec could only obey. So he passed into the adjoining room, where he found Daubrac and Rose Verdiere in animated conversation. He even heard the concluding words of a sentence that sounded very much like an impassioned declaration of love.

“Ah, well,” said Rose, as if to cut short her lover’s transports, “why does the judge delay now he knows the truth?”

“I hardly know,” replied Meriadec, with some embarrassment. “I have told him Sacha’s story, but he does not seem altogether satisfied, and I think he wishes to question each one of us separately.”

“To see if we do not contradict each other, I suppose,” exclaimed the surgeon. “Can it be that he suspects us of being in league with Paul Constantinowitch and his band?”

“Calm yourself, in Heaven’s name! and do not speak so loud. The judge may hear you.”

“It’s all the same to me if he does. If he wants to question me, I am ready.”

The young surgeon started toward the door as he spoke, but Meriadec barred the way and said:

“No, not you. He wants Mademoiselle Verdiere first.”

“The devil! We are not at his orders, and I am going—”

“I beg that you will let me pass,” interrupted the young girl, looking earnestly at her lover.

“What, you will—”

“I will respond to the summons of a magistrate who is anxious to discover the murderers of the child we both mourn,” replied Rose, quietly. “We came here to assist him, and not to hinder his efforts. He has a right to proceed as he thinks fit, and as he has sent for me, I am going.”

Rose opened the door, entered the room, and closed the door after her, leaving Meriadec and Daubrac alone together. As the reader can very readily understand, the young girl had had no time to change her costume, and she was therefore dressed exactly as when she went to the captain’s house.

On seeing her, the magistrate gave a start of surprise.

“So you are the daughter of the former keeper of the tower?” he asked, coldly.

“Yes,” faltered the girl.

“And Monsieur de Saint-Briac is your lover?”

Rose, pale and trembling, averted her eyes without replying.

“You declared as much to me at his house, not two hours ago. Have you forgotten the scene already?”

Rose shook her head.

“I recollect it, and I can repeat all you said, and all that was said by the man who was once my friend. Do you deny it now?”

“I do not deny it,” replied the girl, after an instant’s hesitation.

“Very well. We shall soon see if you spoke the truth. You know of what I accused Monsieur de Saint-Briac, do you not?”

“I know that you allowed yourself to be deceived by an infamous accusation. You must know now who it was that so basely slandered Madame de Malverne, and you

also know that you had an opportunity to see for yourself that she was not there."

"I found you there, and I believed your statements. I did not know who you were then, and I did not wonder that you concealed yourself when I entered, for you gave me to understand that you were a married woman."

"What difference does it make whether I was married or not. The effect would be the same in either case; but I could not allow two friends to kill each other in consequence of a misunderstanding."

"It was a very laudible sentiment that actuated you, I do not doubt; and I no longer doubt the truth of your statements, though they scarcely harmonize with the account which Monsieur de Meriadec has just given me of you. One question now: How long have you known Jacques?"

"Jacques?" repeated the girl, in utter bewilderment.

She had no idea who was the individual referred to. The judge had set a trap for her; she had fallen into it, and he said harshly:

"So you do not know that Jacques is Monsieur de Saint-Briac's first name. That is strange, you must admit. Lovers are not in the habit of calling each other by their last name, at least not when they are alone. When did you see Monsieur de Saint-Briac for the first time?"

Rose, utterly confounded, cast down her eyes, and said not a word.

"You do not answer. Ah, well, I will answer for you. You saw him first, only a few days ago, on the staircase in the tower of which your father had charge."

"I did see him that day, but—"

"Spare me any further falsehoods. Do not try to make me believe that he was your lover at the time of his arrest. If he had been, you would have undertaken his defense. You would have told who he was, and the officers would have seen their mistake."

Rose burst into tears.

"I do not blame you," continued M. de Malverne. "I can even excuse you. To sacrifice one's self for others, is the act of a noble soul; but devotion has its limits, especially when it is ill-bestowed. Pause, mademoiselle, pause upon the brink of the abyss down which you seem about to plunge; think of your reputation, and of your friends, and

do not bring down ruin upon yourself in order to defend persons against whom the evidence is already overwhelming, and who can not escape punishment.”

“But you would have killed them, and I wished to save them,” cried poor Rose, quite forgetting that the exclamation was almost equivalent to the confession of falsehood the magistrate was trying to extort from her.

“And have I not a right to kill them?” retorted M. de Malverne, fiercely. “Why should I not put an end to the life of the unworthy creature who brings disgrace upon an old and honored name? Why should I not drive my sword through the heart of the false friend who has so shamefully deceived me? Do you think I am a man to drag the traitors into the courts and proclaim my misfortune there? No, mademoiselle, I am certain of their guilt, and I shall show them no mercy.”

“But they are innocent!” cried the terrified girl. “Saint-Briac is my lover, not hers.”

She had been on the point of confessing all, but the threats of the infuriated husband checked the words that were upon her lips.

“So you still persist in your absurd assertion,” exclaimed the judge, irritated by her persistence. “You forget that I have it in my power to summon those who will prove the falsity of it.”

This time Rose turned pale. She understood him.

“Before I do that, I will give you a last opportunity to retract your words,” continued the judge, sternly. “Confess that the statement you made to me in relation to Monsieur de Saint-Briac is untrue—that you would not so deceive the kind friend who has protected you. You have not the assurance to persist in your declaration. I understand, and there is nothing left for me but to punish the two miscreants as they deserve.”

“They are innocent,” repeated Rose.

“Let me see if you can repeat this statement in the presence of your friends.”

And without waiting for Rose to reply, Hugh de Malverne hastily flung open the door of the room in which Meriadec and Daubrac were sitting.

“Step in here, gentlemen!” he cried.

“With pleasure,” growled Daubrac, who had been in a fever of impatience for a quarter of an hour.

“Here we are, sir,” said Meriadec.

They entered and were not a little surprised to see Rose Verdiere lying back in an arm-chair, pale, trembling, and half swooning. They both started to run to her, but the judge checked them with a gesture, and said, firmly:

“First listen to me. You are an honorable man, Monsieur Meriadec; and you, also, Monsieur Daubrac. I can consequently speak of my position and feel sure that you will keep my secret, at least until the *dénouement* comes.”

“Pardon me, sir,” interrupted the surgeon, “but we came to inform the judge of instruction that a crime has been committed—”

“I am no longer a judge of instruction,” interposed Malverne. “My resignation will be handed in this evening. I am merely a deeply injured man, who desires proofs of the wrong that has been done him; and these proofs you can furnish.”

The two friends exchanged glances. The same idea occurred to them both. They thought that M. de Malverne had lost his senses; but they could not understand the strange manner of Rose, who seemed to be afraid to look her friends in the face.

“The facts of the case are as follows, gentlemen,” resumed the magistrate. “To-day, while at my office in the Palace of Justice, I received an anonymous letter—”

“It never rains but it pours!” exclaimed Daubrac. “The captain also received one day before yesterday.”

“In this letter I was told that Monsieur de Saint-Briac was my wife’s lover.”

“An atrocious calumny!” exclaimed our worthy friend Meriadec, in perfect good faith.

“The writer added that I could easily satisfy myself of the truth of the accusation if I would go to the captain’s house between three and four o’clock this afternoon. I hastened there, but found no one but Monsieur de Saint-Briac, though I had seen a lady enter the house. A violent quarrel arose between me and my former friend, and just as we were coming to blows, this young lady emerged from the room where she had concealed herself on hearing my ring.”

“You, Rose!” exclaimed Meriadec, turning to the young girl. “There must be some mistake.”

"What he says is perfectly true," replied Rose, in a choked voice.

"I did not know mademoiselle, and she did not know me. You know that I was to examine her for the first time to-morrow. It was not until a few moments ago that I learned who she really is, and that she discovered I was the magistrate to whom the investigation of the tragedy of Notre Dame had been intrusted. I tell you this, gentlemen, in order that you may be able to clearly understand the situation; mademoiselle, as I said before, suddenly appeared before me, and declared that I was mistaken in my suspicions, and that Monsieur de Saint-Briac was her lover, not my wife's."

"She said that!" exclaimed Daubrac, clinching his hands.

"She told me so; and she just repeated the statement. It is for this reason that I wish to subject her to a final test. I wish to know if she will not admit, in your presence, that her pretended confession was only a generous falsehood. I sincerely hope that she will retract her words; but whether she persists in her assertion or not, my mind is made up; and those who have deceived me shall pay dearly for their treachery. I am waiting, gentlemen, for one of you to question the young lady."

A storm of rage and fear which threatened to burst forth at any instant, was rising in Daubrac's heart. He doubted the woman he loved. Meriadec, greatly abashed, asked himself, in a perfect fever of anxiety, if he could be mistaken in regard to his *protégée's* real character; and poor Rose, compelled to choose between the contempt of the man she loved, and the death of the two persons she had undertaken to defend, looked up imploringly into the faces of her friends.

"You hesitate, gentlemen," continued the judge, in a ringing voice. "You hesitate because you do not wish to subject mademoiselle to such a cruel test; because you can guess that she is about to repeat her falsehood, and you wish to spare her the pain of saying in your presence: 'A man I scarcely know is my lover; I have shamefully abused the hospitality of Monsieur de Meriadec; I have deceived Monsieur Daubrac, and I am unworthy of him—'"

"No, no, that is not true!" cried Rose, conquered at last.

“At last!” exclaimed M. de Malverne. “I knew that the truth would be revealed sooner or later. Now I can punish the wretches, and—”

He did not finish the sentence, for the door opened, and Mme. de Malverne appeared upon the threshold. She was as pale as death, but not from fear, for her eyes blazed, and she advanced with head haughtily erect. The artless Mariadec thought she had come to cast herself at her husband’s feet; but she soon undeceived him.

“I have heard all!” she cried. “I am one of the wretches you wish to punish. What are you waiting for?”

“Wretched woman!” cried the magistrate.

Meriadec threw himself between them, while Rose sprung up and ran to Daubrac, who did not repulse her. He had doubted her for an instant, and he now reproached himself bitterly.

“Do you think I would let this young girl sacrifice herself for me?” cried Mme. de Malverne. “On the contrary, I thank her for compelling me to put an end to the life of deceit that I abhor. I never loved you; now, I hate you! If I make this declaration here, in the presence of witnesses, it is only that you may be obliged to fight with the man I love; and if he dies, I, too, will die.”

A terrible catastrophe seemed inevitable, but heaven interposed. The valet re-entered the room, and without appearing to notice the exciting drama that was in progress, respectfully announced to his master that the police commissioner of the Notre Dame precinct was below, and wished to see him immediately.

This interruption came at a most fortunate moment for all concerned; even for M. de Malverne, who had the presence of mind to reply:

“Very well. I will see him.”

The official entered, evidently very ill at ease in the presence of such a numerous company. Judges of instruction are not in the habit of discussing business matters before strangers; and here were two gentlemen and two ladies that the officer had never seen before.

“You can say what you have to say,” remarked M. de Malverne, brusquely. “What is the object of your visit?”

“I wish to speak to you about a crime that seems to be closely connected with the Notre Dame affair,” replied the commissioner. “I consulted a colleague, and he advised

me to see you before sending the man who has just been arrested, to the depot."

Odette did not stop to listen to the explanation in which she took no interest whatever. She had burned her ships behind her, and it made no difference to her whether her husband discovered the murderer of the Russian countess or not. She had entered to vindicate Rose Verdiere, who was so generously sacrificing herself for a comparative stranger, and not to listen to the report of a police magistrate.

To save Rose, to sever her own relations with M. de Malverne, in the presence of strangers, so that the rupture might be final, then to hasten to the man she loved and flee from the country with him, this was her one thought; she had lost her senses completely.

So, after the scene that had filled the hearts of the lookers-on with unspeakable consternation, her sole desire was to get away; and she quietly left the room, after extending to Rose Verdiere a hand that she dared not refuse.

Hugh made no attempt to detain her. What could he say to her in the presence of this official who, very fortunately, had not witnessed the scene? Rose and her two friends were present; but he could rely upon their sympathy and discretion; besides, for the time being, he almost forgot the traitors he was resolved to punish, and once more became the magistrate.

"Give me the facts, sir," he said to the commissioner with a calmness that Meriadec and Daubrac could but admire.

"The facts are as follows," replied the official. "Two policemen while passing the corner of the Rue Cassette, heard an old woman crying, 'Murder!' They entered the court-yard of the house she had just left, and saw a man descending from a window by a rope ladder. They arrested him, and brought him to the station-house. There he told me that his name was Jean Fabreguette."

"Heaven be praised! he is not dead, then," muttered Meriadec.

"He claims to be a friend of the master of the house, and declared that he had just found the dead body of a child in the room which he had entered by the window. I thought at first that he must be crazy; and I am not quite

satisfied on that point even yet; he tells such a very extraordinary story."

"What did you do with him?" interrupted M. de Malverne.

"As I had the honor to tell you, sir, I took him to the office of one of my colleagues, who questioned him, and who thinks that the man is telling the truth. Besides, there is nothing to prove that he is the person who committed the murder on the Rue Cassette, so I took the liberty of bringing him to you."

"Then he is below?"

"Yes, in a carriage, guarded by two policemen."

"Very well. Bring him up."

The commissioner left the room; and M. de Malverne, after requesting Rose and her friends to remain, said to them rather curtly:

"I shall not send in my resignation to-day. I wish to finish with the traitors. You will aid me and keep silence, I am sure."

No one uttered a word. Daubrac and Meriadec understood that this was no time for talk; and Rose was too deeply concerned in regard to the fate of the unhappy wife.

Fabreguette was ushered in by the commissioner. He was in a pitiable plight, truly. He was bareheaded, his hair was disheveled, and his clothing torn and burned in many places. He took no notice whatever of his friends, being deeply incensed against them for their desertion of him, and for having allowed Sacha to be killed. He immediately began an account of his unfortunate adventure, without omitting anything, or making any attempt to disguise the truth. He did not even conceal the fact that the house on the Rue de Marbeuf was burning at that very moment, and that it was he who had set it on fire. No one interrupted him; but when he had finished, M. de Malverne said:

"You are released, sir; but I must ask you to accompany the commissioner, who is going straight to Monsieur de Meriadec's house. These gentlemen are also going, in company with Mademoiselle Verdier; and I would like them to wait for me there. I will join you in half an hour."

There was nothing to do but obey. The commissioner could not venture to question an order given by a judge of

instruction; and the others supposed that M. de Malverne wished to have an explanation with his wife.

But they were mistaken. Hugh de Malverne was resolved to fulfill the duties of a magistrate first of all; besides, he had not fully decided how he should avenge his wrong.

Before coming to a decision, he resolved to merely give his wife orders to await his return, and then to hasten to Meriadec's house. In this way he would secure a few hours for reflection, of which he certainly stood greatly in need, for he was so terribly excited that any attempt to reason was an utter impossibility.

He rang for his valet, with the intention of sending him to tell Odette that he wished to see her, and was not a little surprised to learn that she had just left the house on foot, though the coupé was harnessed ready for use. He thought it quite possible that she had gone to confide the situation of affairs to the captain, and a wild desire to kill them both surged up in his heart. But vengeance is a dish that should be eaten cold, at least in the opinion of Cæsar Borgia, who certainly ought to know whereof he spoke; and M. de Malverne resolved to postpone his until the morrow. They were waiting for him on the Rue Cassette, and he hastened there without further delay.

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER the departure of his friend Hugh, the captain, crushed beneath the weight of his remorse, sat for an hour silent and motionless, revolving different plans of suicide in his mind, and scarcely daring to face the terrible situation in which a guilty love had placed him. How should he escape from it? By committing suicide, he could extricate himself, but what would become of his accomplice?

Flee with Odette, leave France forever to conceal themselves in a foreign land, he, a brave officer who had never recoiled in the presence of danger, or from the fulfillment of a duty! It seemed to him that this would be cowardice.

Perhaps, too, though he scarcely admitted it to himself, his feeling for Odette had changed. The scales had fallen from his eyes; and he saw her as she really was. He realized, too, the sinfulness of his own conduct. Passion had

blinded them both to such a degree as to make them forget that their love was a crime; but on the day of his arrest, Jacques for the first time beheld his conduct toward his friend in its true light.

These bitter truths were now clearly apparent to the unfortunate captain, and he could see no other alternative than an immediate departure. To leave France alone, and leave immediately, under any pretext whatsoever, and inform Hugh of this departure, without telling him where he was going, this would be the wisest course to pursue. The pretext was easily found. He could write to Hugh that he was going away in order to put an end to a false situation, and to give him time to become satisfied of the fact that his suspicions were groundless. Hugh certainly could not take offense at this resolve on the part of his friend; and Odette certainly could not fail to understand that all was over between them. A six months' separation would cure her of her infatuation, and she could not be foolish enough to attempt to rejoin him, as she would not know where he was.

Where should he go? He thought first of Italy; but Italy was too near. Why not Russia? There he could make some inquiries in regard to Sacha's mother, and the man who was now figuring in Paris as a titled Spaniard, though he probably belonged to no particular country, but was a scoundrel everywhere, a citizen nowhere.

He therefore decided upon a trip to Moscow, and resolved to start on the evening of the following day. In fact, he would have gone sooner, on Odette's account; but he had some business arrangements to make with his banker, and he could not cross the Russian frontier without a passport.

It was too late for him to attend to these indispensable preparations that day; but he felt a longing to get out of the house, which now seemed so full of unpleasant associations; so he went out, after telling his valet, who had just returned, not to wait for him.

He little suspected that at the very time he was walking up the Avenue d'Antin, M. de Malverne was just starting out to investigate Sacha's murder, and that Mme. de Malverne had left her home with the firm determination never to return. She was even then hastening to implore the protection of the man she loved; and if he had walked up

the Avenue des Champs Elysees as usual, he would certainly have met her.

But Saint-Briac longed for solitude; so choosing the quay for his promenade, he walked straight on, without knowing or caring where he was going. Lost in thought, he walked on and on, until he reached the Pont de Bercy, only a short distance from the fortifications; but night was fast approaching, and not caring to go beyond the city limits, he took a carriage and ordered the driver to take him to the club, which he reached just at dinner time.

He took a seat at the table and ate his dinner without addressing a word to his neighbors; then, instead of going into the grand salon for his coffee, as usual, he went into the reading-room, where he began his letter to Malverne.

The composition of this epistle was no very easy matter, and consumed a good deal of time. When it was concluded, he placed it in his note-case with the intention of posting it the next evening when he took the train for Berlin.

"I will drop it in the letter-box at the depot," he said to himself, "and when Hugh receives it, I shall have passed the frontier."

After this, he stretched himself out on a sofa in the least frequented room of the club, and tried to sleep, in order to obtain some rest after this prolonged strain upon his nerves, and his long walk. But sleep would not come for a long time, and when it did, it was a troubled slumber in which one frightful nightmare succeeded another until a friend, who happened to be passing, woke him and said:

"What are you thinking of, to lie snoring here when a grand game of baccarat is going on in the green-room. Monsieur de Pancorbo, who is acting as banker, has been asking everybody about you. He seems to miss you."

"Pancorbo!" repeated the captain, springing up suddenly. "What! is he here?"

"Yes," was the tranquil reply. "After midnight is his favorite time."

"I heard that he had left Paris."

"Your informant was mistaken, then. He hasn't been here for two or three days; but he re-appeared this evening in better spirits than ever, and more lucky, if that could be possible."

"And you say he has been inquiring for me?" inquired Saint-Briac, greatly astonished.

“Yes, of everybody. He probably wants to take advantage of his good luck to win a large amount of money from you. He has raked in enough already, however, for he is in a fair way to ruin a millionaire who was admitted to the club last week—a Brazilian. Don’t play unless you are in the humor; but go in and watch the game. It is well worth seeing.”

The captain, who was only half awake, thought he must still be dreaming.

“What time is it?” he asked, rubbing his eyes.

“After three o’clock. You sleep, you do, when you set about it. You stretched yourself out here soon after dinner, and if I had not shaken you, you would still be in the land of dreams. You have had a pretty fair night’s rest now, and I can’t think that you have any desire to go to sleep again. The time is propitious, for the game is nearly over. It is very different with me. I have just lost my last penny, and so have had enough of it. Good-night, captain, and good luck to you.”

Saint-Briac was amazed beyond expression. How dared this wretch, so nearly convicted of murder, show himself at the club; and, above all, how dared he make inquiries about a man against whom he had declared war first by an anonymous letter, and afterward by a most atrocious plot?

But on reflection, the captain perceived that the pretended Spaniard ran very little risk in returning to try his luck at baccarat once more. It was probably for the last time, and there was nothing to prevent him from disappearing altogether after the game was concluded. And what could Saint-Briac do to injure this man? What positive proofs were there that he was the assassin of Notre Dame? None whatever. Mere suspicions are nothing when one has no authority to arrest the suspected party.

M. de Malverne, alone, could assume the responsibility of sending him to prison, and M. de Malverne was not here. Besides, M. de Malverne’s mind was occupied by other matters than the avenging of the Russian lady’s death; and Saint-Briac must therefore depend entirely upon himself if he proposed to punish the cowardly scoundrel who had denounced Odette.

“Ah, well, so be it,” he muttered. “I still have a few hours at my disposal before leaving Paris. I will devote

them to tracking this villain; and if I once get him in my power, I will not let go my hold until I have placed him in the custody of the police. So long as he plays I will play; and when he leaves the club I will dog his footsteps. He will be almost sure to demand an explanation, and then we will see, for it would afford me even greater pleasure to kill him than to deliver him up to justice.”

Having made this bold, though by no means sensible resolve, he proceeded to the green-room, where he found Pancorbo seated among the players. He was not acting as banker now; the Brazilian had superseded him; but he was betting heavily, and fortune did not seem to smile upon him, for he had just lost a large sum.

Saint-Briac stationed himself opposite him, on the other side of the table, declining an offer of a seat in order that he might be able to leave the table as soon as the pretended Spaniard should rise from it. That gentleman seemed to have no immediate intention of doing so, however, for he had just pushed forward a goodly pile of chips. The attention he bestowed upon the game did not prevent him from seeing what was going on around him, however. He perceived the captain almost instantly, and had the assurance to favor him with a bow, which was not returned, it is needless to say.

But though Saint-Briac had no intention of indulging in any interchange of courtesies with the scoundrel, he was equally averse to leading any one to suppose that he had come there to watch him, so he drew a thousand franc note from his wallet, and staked it upon the left. He won; and M. de Pancorbo, who had bet heavily upon the right, lost. The game continued with varying results, but fortune remained faithful to the captain, in the main, and seemed to have turned her back upon the pretended Castilian, who seemed to bear his losses very philosophically, however. So, when the captain gave the signal for a retreat at about nine o'clock in the morning, M. de Pancorbo, who had lost at least fifty thousand francs, and whose supply of available funds seemed to be exhausted, also decided to abandon the contest.

Saint-Briac, who did not lose sight of him for an instant, heard him call a sleepy valet and order a cup of bouillon. The captain immediately ordered a cup of chocolate to be served at a small table only a couple of yards from M. de

Pancorbo, who showed no desire to avoid Saint-Briac's company. He even addressed him first.

"I have not been very fortunate to-night," he remarked, smiling, "but I was delighted to see you a winner. May I venture to inquire the amount of your gains?"

The question was impertinent enough in itself; but this familiar manner of renewing relations with an open enemy was certainly the height of impudence. Still, the moment for which Saint-Briac was waiting had not yet come. All the players had not gone. Some few were still grouped in a corner of the room talking over the events of the evening as soldiers gather about a camp-fire and talk on the evening after an important battle.

"I should say that you must have won at least fifty thousand francs," continued M. de Pancorbo, coolly.

"Fifty-five thousand," replied the captain, without evincing the slightest surprise at the question.

"A very nice little windfall; and you were very fortunate to receive cash. By the way, have you any of my notes?"

"Not a single one."

"I am sorry. I should be glad to have you for a creditor."

"And why, if I may ask?"

"Because I should meet my obligations in person, and should take advantage of the opportunity to have an explanation with you."

"It is not necessary to come to my house for that."

"It is a difficult matter to have any private conversation here. We are not alone."

"We shall be in an instant. See!"

The group was, in fact, dispersing; and in a minute or two there were but two gentlemen left, and they were slowly making their way toward the door, discussing some point in the game as they sauntered along. In the meantime the footmen had raised the curtains, and the clear light of a beautiful spring morning was now streaming into the room.

"Open the window, too!" cried M. de Pancorbo. "It is intolerably warm here; and it is time to admit a little fresh air."

The suggestion was a most welcome one to Saint-Briac, for the atmosphere was impregnated with the smoke of the

innumerable cigars that had been consumed during the memorable game which had lasted fully ten hours.

"You can speak now," remarked the captain. "What do you want to say to me?"

"I must ask, first, whether I have to deal with a friend or an enemy."

"With an enemy, as you know perfectly well."

"I suspected as much; but I was anxious to hear you say so. Now I feel more free to ask you to put an end to a state of things that is extremely disagreeable to both of us."

"Put an end to this state of things, indeed!" exclaimed the captain, exasperated beyond endurance by this marvelous assurance. "It is you that I am resolved to put an end to."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the pretended Spaniard, coolly.

"You know perfectly well. I intend to suppress you."

"In what way, may I ask?"

"By delivering you up to justice, which will make you answer for your many crimes."

"You mean for the death of the woman who was thrown from one of the towers of Notre Dame, I suppose? So you still believe that I am the person who committed the crime?"

"I have proofs of it."

"You surprise me. Still, I understand the cause of your error. You received a letter from me which you regard as a proof. In this letter I threatened to denounce you to Monsieur de Malverne if you continued to play the spy; and from this you concluded that I was the man you were seeking. Permit me to say that this was a very rash conclusion on your part. I have my secrets, it is true, and I do not care to have people dogging my footsteps; but all this does not prove that I am an assassin."

"What are you, then?"

"A conspirator, simply. I left Spain in consequence of certain political events, and I am anxious to return to my native land. Consequently I am trying to overthrow the government that exiled me; and I am on the eve of success. Everything is in readiness for the revolution which I have planned in Paris, and which will speedily make itself felt in Madrid; so speedily, in fact, that I expect to leave

France this evening and cross the Pyrennees to-morrow to place myself at the head of the movement. Had you denounced me, I should, perhaps, have been arrested by the French authorities, and all my carefully laid plans would, in that case, have come to naught; but I should not have had the slightest difficulty in proving that I was in no way connected with the crime of Notre Dame. Now, having no further need to exercise caution, I can throw off the veil of mystery that has enshrouded my life ever since my arrival in Paris. I can reveal my real name, and bring forward twenty witnesses to vouch for the truth of my statements. Consequently, I advise you not to put your threats into execution, for you would only create a scandal which it would be greatly to your interest to avoid."

"But you wrote to Monsieur de Malverne; and I have nothing more to lose now."

"I did write to him, I admit; and I am very sorry that I was obliged to resort to such measures; but you compelled me to do it. I had you watched, and learned that you had entered into a league against me—a league headed by a sort of Don Quixote or lunatic. I was obliged to nip this scheme in the bud; and it was upon you that the punishment fell. You suffered for them. I am sorry for it, but I wanted to disgust you with waging war upon me. The salvation of my country, and the lives of many brave men, my political allies, were at stake."

"Then you confess that you were the writer of the anonymous letter Monsieur de Malverne received yesterday?"

"The same. I know, too, that he went to your house; but I am ignorant of what passed between you there. It can have been nothing of a very serious nature, as you just spent the night at the card-table; so I need feel no very deep remorse for the fright I gave you. But you will never forgive me for what I have done, and I, for my part, can no longer trust you; so it is necessary that one of us should disappear."

"Is it a duel you propose?"

"Yes, for want of some better way out of the difficulty; and I intend to leave Paris this evening."

"I, too, intend to leave this evening."

"We might arrange to meet on foreign soil; but that would be useless; for, once out of France, we should have

nothing to fear from each other. Besides, we are not bound for the same country, I suppose."

"I am going to Russia."

"In search of the assassin of Notre Dame, doubtless," sneered M. de Pancorbo. "I sincerely hope that you may find him; but, as I am under no obligation to take your word, I would like to settle our little account immediately."

"And I, too," retorted the captain.

"But here lies the difficulty. To fight a duel, one must have seconds; and, under the circumstances, we should have some difficulty in finding them."

"We can dispense with them."

"If that is your opinion, there is nothing to prevent our ending the affair this morning. I even think that it would be well for us not to separate until we have settled the matter. You distrust me, and I distrust you; and if we parted, each of us would feel sure that the other was plotting some treachery. The question of weapons remains to be decided. We can go out together to purchase them. I have a revolver with me, but—"

"And so have I."

"Ah, well. Why, it is of exactly the same caliber as mine— exactly the same," said Pancorbo, after comparing the two weapons, which both men had drawn from their pockets with an almost simultaneous movement. "Six shooters both of them, and of exactly the same size. All the revolvers that Parisian gun-smiths sell are of precisely the same pattern. Now, where shall we fight?"

"That makes very little difference to me, provided we fight to the death," said Saint-Briac, seized with a cold rage, and resolved to end the matter at any cost.

"That is understood, of course," replied M. de Pancorbo. "One of us must vanish from the face of the earth. Otherwise, it would not be worth while to fight at all. But to return to my question: Where shall we fight? The suburbs of Paris are so much frequented, especially at this season of the year, that we might walk about for hours before we could find a suitable place; and neither you nor I have any time to lose, so we must go further."

"Or else nearer. In a private house; in my house, for instance."

"I do not suppose there is any room forty feet, or even thirty feet long, in your house; besides, you have servants

who, at the sound of the very first shot, would rush out in search of the police. What I want, is a place where we should be entirely alone, and where we should be in no danger of arrest by too zealous officials. An idea occurs to me, suggested, doubtless, by the history of the crime of which you so unjustly accuse me."

"I do not understand you."

"The woman you wish to avenge was thrown, you pretend, from the top of one of the towers of Notre Dame, and no one came to disturb the assassin, as he was able to make his escape before any one could get there to arrest him. What do you say to a duel at the same place?"

"I think that would be an impossibility. You would not find it a suitable place by any means. In the first place, there is free access to the tower at any and all times, on payment of a few sous; and we should be sure to be preceded and followed by visitors; besides, the platform that surmounts the tower is no larger than an ordinary room."

"I know nothing about that; but we should not have to climb way up there. What I propose is a duel after the Indian fashion; and the gallery at the base of the towers would answer finely for that. Each of us can take his stand at one end of the gallery that extends under the rose window, and advance upon his adversary. At that height, the sound of a pistol-shot would be lost in space; and passers-by in the square below would hear nothing."

Saint-Briac was an impulsive man, and very easily influenced, and for some seconds he had been wondering if this man was not really a Spaniard and a conspirator whom Meriadec and his friends had mistaken for the murderer of the countess.

He was ignorant of the recent crimes of the person accused, for he had not heard of Sacha's murder, nor of Fabreguette's imprisonment. The anonymous letter addressed to M. de Malverne might have been written by M. de Pancorbo to rid himself of a gentleman who was interfering with the writer's political schemes. In this way, Saint-Briac's imagination led him to forget the facts that convicted this scoundrel beyond any possibility of doubt; besides, the singular conditions of this proposed duel pleased him.

A hostile meeting was inevitable, since Pancorbo avowed

himself the writer of the letter; besides, what the captain desired above all else was to kill his enemy, or be killed himself as soon as possible.

“Very well, we will try it,” said he, “and if we find the place taken, we can fight somewhere else.”

“Then come, sir,” replied M. de Pancorbo, rising. “As it has been decided that we are to go together, we had better take a carriage in order to reach our destination as soon as possible.”

This arrangement suited Saint-Briac. His distrust was not entirely dispelled, and he wished to prevent his enemy from communicating with any auxiliary.

The captain watched his companion closely as they descended the staircase, but he could detect no gesture addressed to the footmen who were yawning in the vestibule, nor did he see any suspicious-looking person in the street.

There were plenty of carriages in front of the club door. They chose one; and M. de Pancorbo told the coachman to take them to the intersection of the Rue Parvis and the Rue d'Arcole. This was the very spot where Sacha had alighted from the carriage with his mother, on the day of the crime; but the captain, who was ignorant of this fact, did not remark the coincidence. They soon reached the place indicated, and when they alighted, M. de Pancorbo dismissed the carriage.

“This is contrary to custom,” he remarked, smiling. “A carriage is generally retained to carry away the wounded, but that is not necessary in this case, for there will be only a dead man.”

“Or two dead men,” corrected the captain, with a searching look at his adversary.

“Let us hope that one of us will survive. But however the affair may end, let us make haste. I see no one either in the gallery or in the tower, so let us take advantage of the opportunity.”

They walked straight to the entrance, began the ascent of the winding staircase, and soon reached the grating, which was closed. The new keeper promptly appeared, in answer to the bell, and received them more politely than the late Verdier would have done.

“You are very welcome, gentlemen,” he said, as he pocketed the customary fee. “I have been in charge here three days, and it was not until yesterday that the au-

thorities repealed the order forbidding any one to ascend the tower. This order was given on account of the unfortunate affair that occurred here a few days ago, and only this morning I was notified that the judge of instruction would come here to-day to visit the south tower. I was ordered to keep the grating closed to everybody after eleven o'clock, but now it is only ten. You, gentlemen, were wise to come early, for the air is very clear, and you can enjoy the view undisturbed."

M. de Pancorbo rewarded his informant with a piece of silver. The news seemed to please him; but it was far from gratifying to Saint-Briac, who was not inclined to run any risk of finding himself face to face with M. de Malverne. But the die was cast. Besides, the duel could not last long, and Hugh never went to the palace until after breakfast.

"When he arrives," the captain said to himself, "he will find the dead body of Odette's defamer or mine. If I am killed he will perhaps forgive her who survives me; and if I kill this man, he will never hear of me again."

"Pass up first, sir," said Saint-Briac.

"Do you insist upon giving place to me?" inquired the so-called Marquis de Pancorbo, sneeringly.

"Absolutely."

"As you please, I am not afraid."

The pretended Spaniard knew perfectly well that the captain was afraid of being attacked from behind as he ascended the stairs, but he knew perfectly well that the captain would scorn to take such a treacherous advantage of him, so he did not object to passing up first.

The keeper had returned to his lodge without troubling himself any further about them, so when they reached the gallery, there was nothing for them to do but decide upon the conditions of the duel. This did not take long.

"It is understood," said Pancorbo, "that each of us has a right to fire until his revolver is empty—six shots in succession, consequently. The firing is to be at will, and any ruse is permissible. As to the choice of places, we will draw lots for that, if you prefer."

"I will allow you to choose," replied the captain.

"Then I will choose the end next the south tower, the tower where the murder was committed, if I remember rightly. You can remain here, while I cross the gallery.

When I reach the other end, you can give the signal by raising your revolver in the air, with the barrel pointed upward. I will repeat the gesture, and we shall then be at liberty to begin firing. Is this agreeable to you?"

"Perfectly. Proceed, sir."

The pretended conspirator started to cross the gallery, taking good care to walk backward, so as not to lose sight of his adversary, who had not the slightest intention of abusing his power, however.

Saint-Briac could not behold, without deep emotion, the gallery which he had visited with Mme. de Malverne; and his eyes instinctively turned to the place where she was leaning when the wind blew away her veil. Their misfortunes had begun here.

A strange fatality had brought him back here once more, and death had no terrors for him now, provided he could first kill the scoundrel who had brought all this misery upon them.

The captain, energetically repelling these sad memories, gave the required signal, but he had scarcely done so when he lost sight of his opponent, who had instantly concealed himself behind a projecting angle. Saint-Briac imitated this maneuver, and asked himself how he should manage to attack his opponent without exposing himself.

The safest plan was evidently to remain in ambush, and wait for his adversary to show himself; but if the pretended Spaniard adopted the same plan, an exchange of shots would never take place.

Moreover, a man of Saint-Briac's temperament was not likely to resort to a course of temporizing that would expose him to any risk of being surprised by M. de Malverne, whose speedy arrival, accompanied by all the pomp and circumstance of an official visit, was almost certain.

"We should have done much better to station ourselves fifteen paces from each other and fire until one of us was killed," thought the captain. "I want to end the matter, and I am going to advance. To fire at me, he will have to show himself, and then the best shot of the two will be the victor."

Before he stepped from his place of concealment, he satisfied himself that the six cartridges were in their barrels, and that the trigger worked easily. These precautions taken, he began the circuit of the massive base of the north

tower. His plan was to rush out from the side next to the nave, dart across the gallery and attack Pancorbo in the niche where he had taken refuge, so he hastened on with a stealthy, wolf-like step; but unfortunately, he did not think of looking behind him.

The very same plan had occurred to the Spaniard. He had emerged from his hiding-place, and abandoning the protecting shelter of the south tower, he darted across the gallery that extends along underneath the rose-window, and, revolver in hand, safely reached the spot the captain had just left. Not finding him there, he understood, and followed him.

Saint-Briac before starting to cross the gallery, paused for an instant to satisfy himself that his enemy was not watching him from behind some projecting corner, and this delay, short as it was, proved fatal to him. Pancorbo fired, almost within an arm's length of his opponent, and killed him instantly with a bullet that shattered his spinal column.

The unfortunate captain fell face downward, and his murderer lost no time in robbing him of the money won at the card-table during the preceding night. It was only to rob him that he had proposed this strange duel. Fifty thousand francs would not be a bad thing to take away with him when he left France never to return. There was nothing to keep him there, now; all his atrocious plans had been accomplished. His vile accomplice had already crossed the frontier, and there was nothing to prevent him from doing the same that very night.

He searched the pockets of the dead man, appropriated the purse containing the bank notes, and ran to the staircase. He knew that the magistrate would soon arrive, and he had no desire to be caught in the act. The whole affair had not taken ten minutes, consequently the survivor might reasonably hope to escape from the building without any difficulty, and once on the street, he would have nothing more to fear, for all the preparations had been made for his departure.

He glided softly down the narrow staircase, but he had gone only a few steps when he heard voices and footsteps below. He paused to listen, and soon discovered that several persons were coming up. He instantly abandoned all idea of continuing his descent, for these people, whoever

they might be, would be sure to see the captain's body in the gallery, and instantly divining that the man they had just met was the murderer, they would start in pursuit of him.

Consequently, it would be much more prudent to turn back, and endeavor to make his escape by some other way. He knew one that had already served him well when he attempted to escape, after he had thrown the countess from the south tower—a perilous way it was, but it led to another staircase, and he had no choice now, so he ran to the place where, by scaling the balustrade, he could drop down upon a sloping portion of the roof.

He was playing his last card. He had succeeded in everything thus far. His audacity and crafty maneuvers had freed him from all who had declared war against him. He had just treacherously killed the most dangerous of all his enemies, and he was about to leave France laden with the spoils of his victims. He had only to make a quick leap, and a careful leap, before the arrival of the persons he heard coming up, and all would be well.

All this passed through the scoundrel's mind in much less time than it takes to write it; and running nimbly to the balustrade, he leaned over it, to measure the distance. He was still in this position when Meriadec, Daubrac, and Fabreguette reached the gallery.

M. de Malverne had expressed a desire to visit the towers, the scene of the late tragedy, the evening before, and had invited the three friends to accompany him; and, as the keeper had stated, the hour appointed was eleven o'clock.

So the baron and his friends had met at Daubrac's rooms in the hospital, at ten o'clock that morning to take breakfast with him, and there await the judge's arrival at the church. All three happened to be looking out of the same window from which the surgeon and Meriadec had seen the veiled lady cross the square on the arm of a handsome gentleman they did not know; but this time, it was Fabreguette who saw the captain and M. de Pancorbo alighting from a carriage at the corner of the Rue d'Arcole, and who pointed them out to his companions. They saw the two men proceed in the direction of the church, and without trying to decide what had brought them there, they hastened out to overtake them.

But unfortunately, before reaching the square, they had

to descend at least eighty steps, and the baron, whom his companions were unwilling to desert, no longer possessed the agility of twenty summers.

When they reached the staircase of the tower, the persons they were pursuing had already reached the gallery. A short time was also wasted in arguing with the keeper, who at first refused to let them pass, but who was finally brought to terms by the gift of a five franc piece from Meriadec.

But on reaching the gallery, Fabreguette, who was a little in advance of the others, instantly perceived the captain's body, which was lying face downward, at the foot of the north tower. To hasten to it, and raise it, was the work of but an instant. Meriadec and Daubrac, who reached it almost at the same moment, knelt to examine the wound of their unfortunate ally, and perceived that life was extinct.

"He shot him from behind, the coward!" cried Fabreguette.

"And yet, the captain evidently came here to fight a duel," muttered Meriadec. "See, his revolver is still in his right hand."

Daubrac rose, took up the pistol, satisfied himself that it had not been fired, and said, with suppressed rage:

"Now, gentlemen, we must see to it that the scoundrel does not escape. He has not gone down, or we should have met him on the staircase, so he can not be far off."

"Unless he hastened to the platform above when he heard us coming up."

"Ah, well, we will follow him, then. I ask to be allowed to go first. I am armed, and if he should take it into his head to shoot, I have it in my power to retaliate."

Meriadec said nothing, but he was beginning to recall that on the day of the preceding crime, the assassin had discovered a way to escape without descending the tower staircase.

While they were hesitating, Pancorbo had climbed the balustrade, and after clinging to it for an instant with both hands, had succeeded in leaping astride the stone ridge of the roof which here slanted sharply to the hollow at the base of the south tower. The wretch said to himself:

"While they are ascending the bell tower, I can slide down the roof, and before they reach the platform, I shall

reach the little door leading to the staircase that ends just behind the choir. I shall escape again to-day, and as I shall be out of France before to-morrow morning, the judge will have his labor for his pains."

"Don't let us waste any more time here," cried Daubrac, who was still at the north end of the gallery. The first thing to be done is to station a guard at the foot of the stairs we just climbed. You, Meriadec, will do me the favor to stand guard at the door below while Fabreguette and I begin our hunt after the assassin."

"Begin by searching this gallery, particularly the side next the nave," replied Meriadec, starting for his post.

The surgeon and Fabreguette followed this advice. They advanced as far as the south tower, carefully scrutinizing that portion of the roof where the tanks are located; and when they returned to examine the roof of the nave, they paused directly above the place where the assassin was perched.

They did not see him, but he saw them and recognized them. Then a fierce struggle ensued in the scoundrel's brain. He realized that he would be lost if they should discover him, and said to himself that if he could kill them, he was saved. He had his revolver in his pocket, and the heads of his two enemies formed two capital targets only about six feet above him. He could not miss them.

The temptation proved too strong. Lifting his right leg a little, so as to bring his pocket within reach, he succeeded in extracting the pistol from it. He even succeeded in cocking it. But just as he was endeavoring to find some place of support for his elbow in order to aim correctly, the click of the weapon attracted the attention of Fabreguette, who instantly exclaimed:

"See! the marquis!"

Daubrac looked and saw a man whom he recognized without ever having seen, for who but the assassin would be perched upon this ridge-piece at such a moment.

"So we've found you at last," continued Fabreguette. "Heaven knows I have been running after you long enough! But you are caught this time, my fine fellow. You can promenade the roof of Notre Dame if you like, but you will not succeed in escaping from it. The church is guarded, and in a few moments, the judge, a commis-

sioner of police, and several gendarmes will be here to take you into custody."

Even while the artist was speaking, a bullet carried away his red cap, after grazing his forehead.

"So that is your little game!" cried Fabreguette. "You want to kill *us* now. Hand me your pistol, Daubrac, and let me send this hound to the pavement below, where he threw the countess."

"No, let me do it," replied the surgeon.

The scoundrel saw that he was doomed, but he was resolved not to die alone, and to make his aim more sure, he raised himself, and attempted to kneel upon the ridge plate upon which he had previously been reclining. He succeeded, and his weapon was aimed straight at Fabreguette's head, when just as he was about to pull the trigger, his left knee slipped, and he lost his balance. The bullet whistled harmlessly through the air, and the person who had fired it fell from his perch. He clung for an instant to a gargoyle that projected several feet from the cornice below, but his hands relaxed their hold, and he fell, turning a double somersault in mid air, at the foot of the south tower, where his skull was fractured upon a great pile of building stones placed there by a contractor who was repairing the church. The Countess Xenia was avenged.

CHAPTER XII.

TEN years have elapsed, and this tragedy which once stirred Paris to its very center, is well-nigh forgotten.

M. and Mme. Daubrac have three lovely children, and are perfectly happy. The humble surgeon of the Hôtel-Dieu has become rich and famous; the obscure maker of artificial flowers is the most charming of women, and the best of mothers.

She is no longer the Angel of the Bells, but the angel of the fireside.

Meriadec will die a bachelor, but the love and the companionship of his friend's family more than suffice for his happiness. Fabreguette's pictures have been among the chief attractions of the salon for four years past, and he counts upon receiving a medal at the next exhibition.

Odette de Malverne died of heart-disease only a few weeks

after the tragedy of Notre Dame. Did her husband have time to forgive her? God only knows, for the judge died the year following, and he never had another friend.

All the others are happy and prosperous, but the grass grows on the forgotten graves of Odette de Malverne and Jacques de Saint-Briac. To each man according to his works.

THE END.

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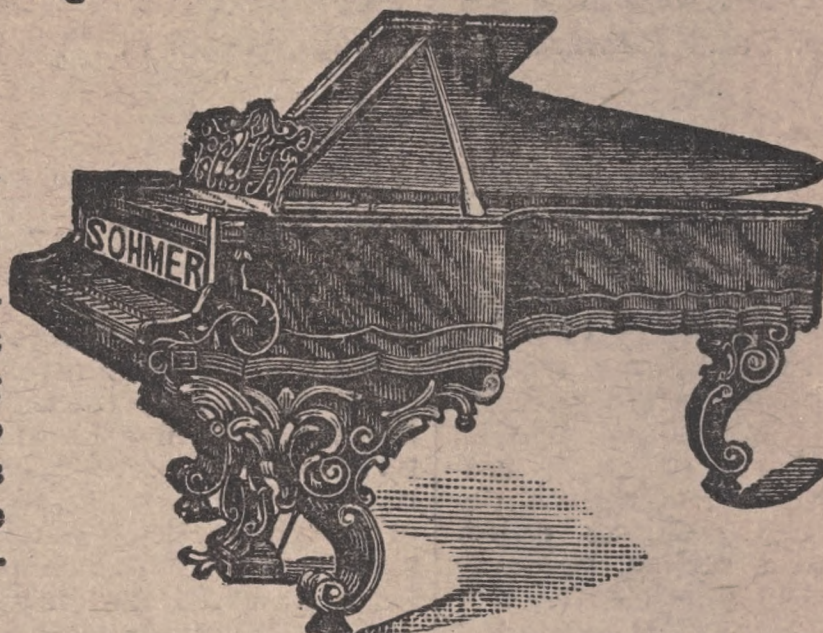
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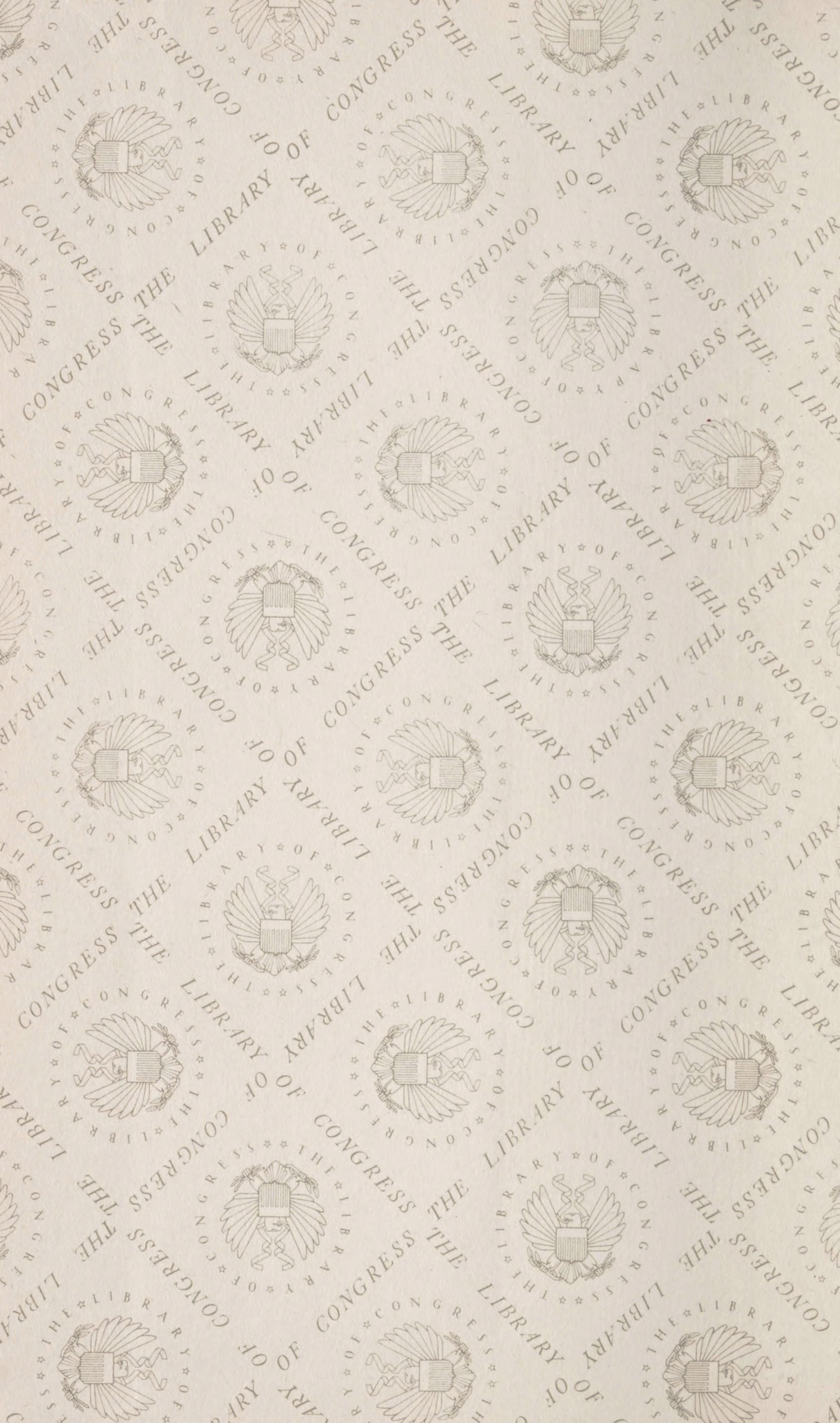
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